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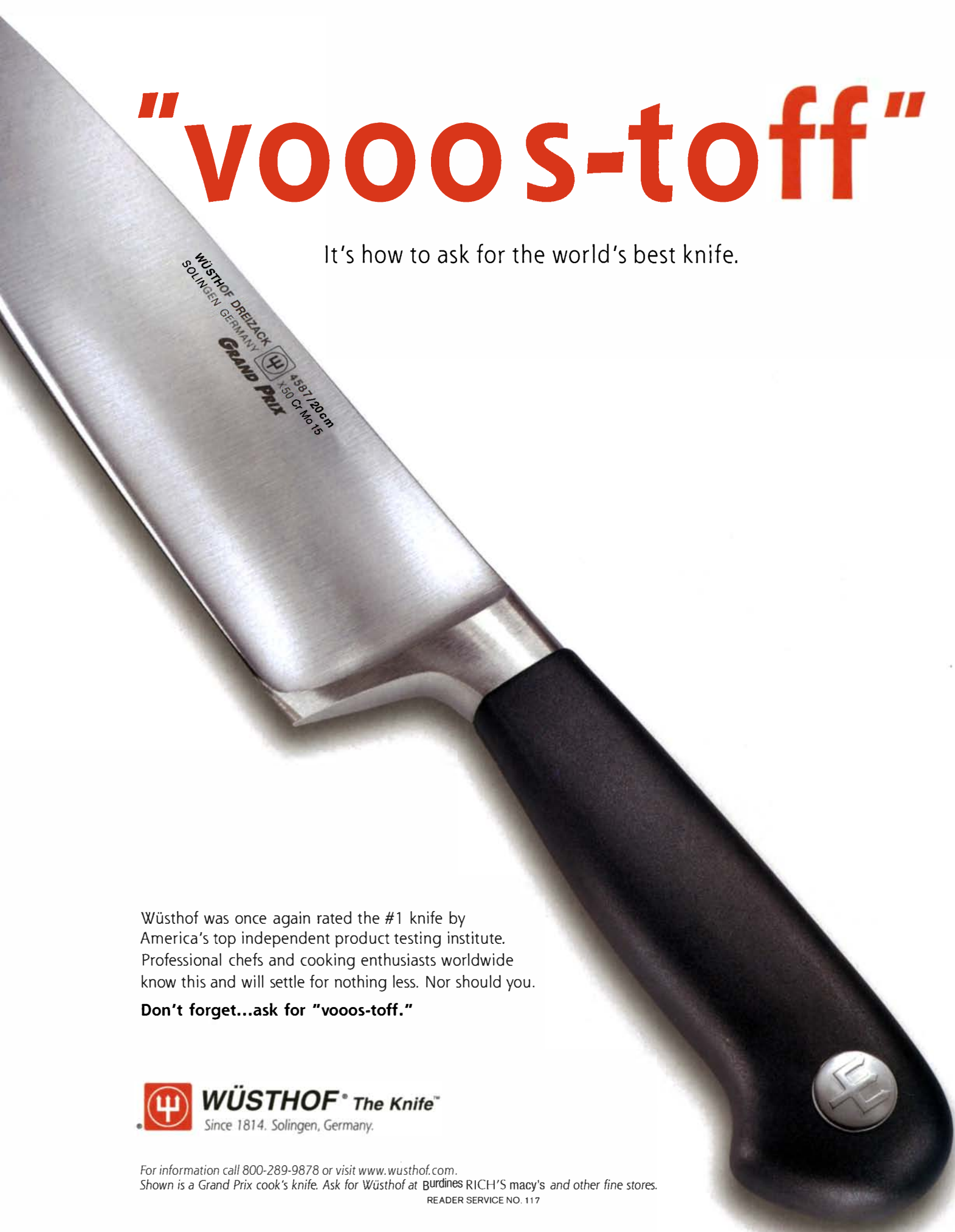
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APRIL / MAY 2003 ISSUE 57



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86C

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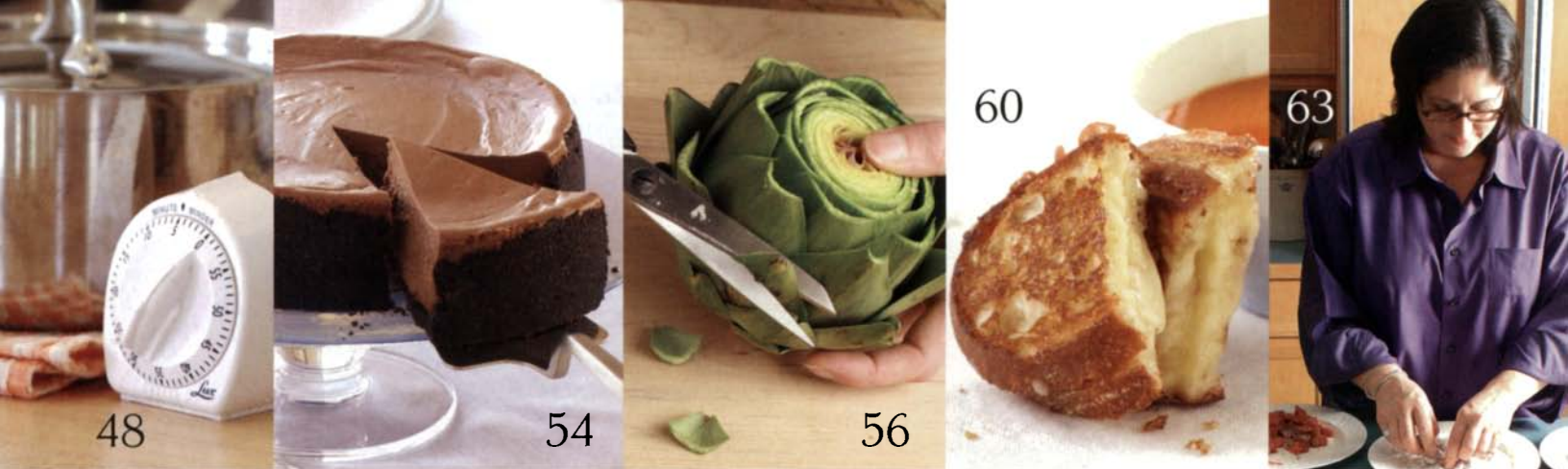
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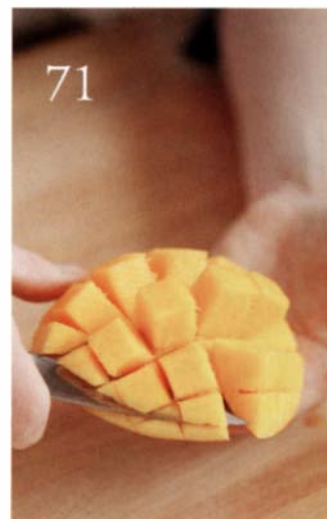
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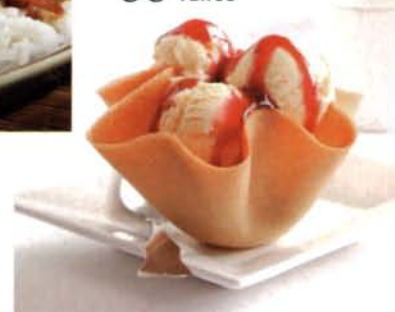
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Goodbye Winter, Hello Spring

This is a quirky time of year: One day we're craving a steaming bowl of soup, the next we're longing for something light and bright. That's why we're offering lots of recipes that satisfy your need for winter and springtime flavors in this issue. Whether you're planning a party or just need inspiration for dinner tonight, here are some delicious ideas.

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OUR SPECIAL RECIPE SECTION IS A YEAR OLD

We're just beginning the second year of including our special Quick & Delicious section in every issue. While a few readers were nostalgic for the single-recipe format of the old Quick & Delicious, many more of you have written to tell us you appreciate the variety—eight recipes in each issue—and the convenience of being able to pull out the section and refer to it easily.

While we never intended the section to be for beginner cooks, we've been happy to learn that a lot of folks who are new to cooking feel comfortable starting with a Quick & Delicious recipe.

In this edition of Quick & Delicious, we're pleased to present a great collection of Arlene Jacobs's recipes that are built around simple techniques and familiar ingredients but that all have an intriguing twist to them, like her Spaghetti with Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts or her Pork Chops with a Dijon-Rye Crust—quick enough for weeknights but definitely delicious enough for entertaining, too. Please let us know which recipes have been your favorites.

—Martha Holmberg,
publisher/editor in chief

Getting the right grind for ragù

I enjoyed the article in *Fine Cooking* #53 on Biba Caggiano's Bolognese (p. 64). It's one of my favorite dishes—

the culinary equivalent of being wrapped in a big Italian blanket.

Regarding the note on using ground pork shoulder: Unless you have a friendly relationship with a neighborhood butcher, it may be hard to find. Supermarkets frown on grinding plain pork. Commercial grinding machines are very large, and they have to grind a great deal of pork to generate a usable amount for the buyer. Supermarket butchers sometimes will try to sell a customer bulk sausage, which would not work very well in this recipe.

A KitchenAid stand mixer fitted with the meat grinder attachment does a great job of

grinding pork at home. You don't lose much (if any) to the grinder. Boneless "country-style" ribs cut into large chunks work as well as pork shoulder; there isn't as much sinew, and there's no thick skin to cut away.

A food processor used on "pulse" is a viable grinding alternative. Just don't overdo it and turn the meat into paste.

—"Chiffonade," via e-mail

Are we preserving lemons or not?

In your Mediterranean Make-Ahead Menu (*Fine Cooking* #55), the "Timeline" on p. 44 says to "lightly rinse and drain the preserved lemons." However, I can't find mention of preserved lemons in the recipes that make up the menu. As I would like to prepare this menu, can you tell me if there are supposed to be any preserved lemons, and



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READER SERVICE NO. 86

if so, in which dish, and how should they be used?

—Karen Klatsky,
Chesieres, Switzerland

Editors' note: We seem to have tripped over our titles in that Timeline. What we were referring to was the Savory Lemon Garnish (p. 46)—a quick and easy version of true preserved lemons—that goes with the braised chicken. We apologize for the confusion.

^{fine}Cooking ...around the country

March 15-16: *Fine Cooking* exhibits at the Napa Valley Mustard Festival, Napa, California. Meet senior editor Amy Albert and contributors Tim Gaiser and Emily Luchetti, and sample mustards, gourmet products, wines, and brews at the Napa Exposition. For details, call 707-938-1133 or visit www.mustardfestival.org.

March 18: *Fine Cooking's* publisher Martha Holmberg demonstrates quick-to-make meals at De Gustibus Cooking School at Macy's New York. For more details, go to www.degustibusinc.com.

March 26-30: *Fine Cooking* joins its sister publications from The Taunton Press in an exhibit at the Western Massachusetts Home & Garden Show at the Eastern States Exposition Grounds, West Springfield, Massachusetts. Visit www.westernmassshow.com for a schedule of events.

April 3: *Fine Cooking* publisher Martha Holmberg demonstrates great dinners from the sauté pan at Whole Foods Market on River Street in Cambridge, Massa-

Straightening out our facts

In our Great Finds write-up of Catch of the Sea tuna (*Fine Cooking* #53, p. 38), we said that the tuna is packed "in natural juices, oil, and sea salt" but in fact there is no added oil.

In our Tasting Panel on mustards (#52, p. 78), we said that Maille mustard was the only one we tasted that was produced in France, but in fact Roland Dijon mustard is also made in France.

chusetts. Call Whole Foods at 617-876-6990 for more details.

April 5: Jennifer Bushman presents Quick & Delicious recipes at her Nothing To It! Culinary Center in Reno. For details, visit www.nothingtoit.com.

April 28 - May 3: Jennifer Bushman presents *Fine Cooking* On the Grill at Central Market Cooking Schools in Austin, San Antonio, Plano, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston. Visit www.centralmarket.com for a schedule of classes.

May 4: Jennifer Bushman demonstrates Quick & Delicious recipes from *Fine Cooking* at Bloomingdale's in New York City. For information, call 212-705-2000.

Plus: In the Boston area, listen for senior editor Amy Albert on "The Cooking Couple" on radio stations WPLM 1390 AM and WBNW 1120 AM. Check local listings for dates. In the Seattle area, contributing editor Abby Dodge can be heard on Brian Poor's "Poor Man's Kitchen" on KOMO radio. Tune into Jennifer Bushman's "Nothing to It" television show for demonstrations of recipes from *Fine Cooking* on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

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It may only be early spring, but we're jumping ahead to Christmas and our next Holiday Baking issue.

Are you familiar with the concept of a cookie exchange? Each member of a group of, say, eight friends makes eight dozen of her or his favorite cookie. Then they all exchange, and each friend ends up with a dozen each of eight different kinds of cookie.

We'd like to try a "virtual" version with our readers—sharing the recipes, if not the cookies themselves.

So send us your favorite original holiday cookie recipe. Our baking guru and contributing editor Abby Dodge will review, test, and choose a great selection that we'll publish in our next Holiday Baking issue, due out November 2003. And readers whose recipes are selected will win a great gift basket of our favorite baking tools and gadgets.

We'll give a gift basket filled with our favorite baking gear to each person whose recipe is selected.

Be sure your recipe is original, meaning it's something you've developed yourself or an old family favorite (not a recipe that you cut out of a magazine a few years ago...we need to be mindful of copyright issues).

And tell us why this cookie is so good—the flavor, texture, keeping qualities, looks, best version of a traditional cookie, easy to do ahead—whatever makes it one of your favorites.

Tips for writing a great cookie recipe:

Flour. If you can, use a scale and tell us how much the flour weighs. If you use measuring cups, please spoon the flour into the cup and level it off with a knife. And tell us what brand of flour you use.

Sugar: Specify granulated, light, or dark brown sugar.

Eggs: Specify what size and how warm or cool.

Nuts: Specify how finely chopped, toasted or not.

Describe the texture of the dough at various stages—should it feel crumbly, stiff, sticky, silky? Tell us the size of the drop or the thickness of the slice, as well as the type of pan you use and whether it's greased or ungreased. Precision and detail will help us get the results you want us to get.

Deadline: Send entries by mail, fax, or e-mail to be received on or before April 1, 2003 to: Cookie Exchange, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506; fax 203-426-3434; or fc@taunton.com (put "cookie exchange" in the subject line).



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TONY ROSENFELD ("Sear & Steam Vegetables," p. 44) sautéed his fair share of asparagus and broccoli while he "worked the line" at Boston restaurants Anago and L'Espalier, and he's now perfected his favorite method for cooking them at home. An associate editor for *Fine Cooking*, Tony works with chefs and cookbook authors across the country, develops recipes, and writes features on his favorite foods.

As a student first and then a cookbook editor at the Culinary Institute of America, **JENNIFER ARMENTROUT** ("Rice Pilaf," p. 48) always imagined her dream job would be in a magazine test kitchen. She arrived at *Fine Cooking* in 2000 as an assistant editor, but shortly after leapt at the chance to become the test kitchen manager. Now she gets to cook all day—and do some writing and editing, too, while putting together the test kitchen's own special section in each issue (see p. 70).

Studying pastry in Paris at La Varenne and working with masters like Guy Savoy and Michel Gerard gave **ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE** ("Triple-Chocolate Cheesecake," p. 52) her solid grounding in French technique. "But my true passion is classic American desserts, like chocolate cheesecake," she says. Abby is the author of *The Kid's Cookbook*, *Great Fruit Desserts*, and *Williams-Sonoma's Dessert*.

JANET FLETCHER ("Artichokes," p. 54) is a staff food writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where her reporting has twice won the James Beard award, as well as the

2000 Bert Greene award. Janet writes frequently on food and wine for several national magazines and has written or co-written fifteen books on food and wine, including *The Cheese Course*, *Fresh from the Farmers' Market*, *Pasta Harvest*, and the forthcoming *Four Seasons Pasta*, due out next spring.

LAURA WERLIN ("Grilled Cheese," p. 60) always intended to become a food writer, but she got waylaid by a 16-year stint in television news. Once on the food writing track, Laura turned to the subject that most captivated her: cheese. She wrote the award-winning book, *The New American Cheese: Profiles of America's Great Cheesemakers & Recipes for Cooking With Cheese*. Her next book, *The All American Cheese & Wine Book*, will be out this spring.

LISA SCHROEDER ("Beef Stroganoff," p. 63) is the chef-owner of

Mother's Bistro & Bar in Portland, Oregon, where her specialty is home cooking, "from northern Italy to Nashville." Before moving to Portland, Lisa worked as a line cook at two top-tier New York bastions, Lespinasse and Le Cirque. She has apprenticed with French superstars such as Roger Verge and Mark Veyrat and is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park.

JOANNE CHANG ("Touilles," p. 66) headed the pastry kitchen at several highly regarded Boston restaurants before heading to New York City to study under François Payard at his pâtisserie. After a year at Payard's, where she discovered the full range of possibilities with touilles, Joanne returned to Boston to open her own shop. For the last two and a half years, she's been baking breads, cakes, tarts, cookies, and even a few savory items at Flour, her bakery and café in Boston's South End.

PERLA MEYERS ("Salmon," p. 38) first grabbed the attention of the culinary world in 1973, when her cookbook, *The Seasonal Kitchen*, advocated an approach to cooking based on the freshest seasonal ingredients. For many cooks, it was the first step away from the frozen and canned vegetable world. Perla hasn't stopped inspiring since then. This fall, her latest book, *Ask Perla: The 1,000 Questions You Had in Cooking School and Never Dared to Ask*, will be published by Wiley & Sons. She's also the author of *The Peasant Kitchen*, *From Market to Kitchen*, *The Art of Seasonal Cooking*, *Fresh From the Garden*, and *Spur of the Moment Cook*. She teaches cooking workshops around the country, works as a consultant to major food corporations, and is a frequent visitor to the kitchens of the best restaurants both here and in Europe, always looking to learn new techniques to keep her cooking fresh.



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Delicate, nutty mâche

We usually only see mâche (or lamb's lettuce) in restaurants, where chefs sometimes use its tiny leaves as much for style as for flavor. But this heirloom variety of mâche from Epic Roots in California has a nutty flavor and substantial texture that make it a versatile green. Dress it with a light citrus vinaigrette for an elegant salad or use it as a bed for grilled steak. Epic Root's mâche is a bit sturdier than most varieties and holds up well in the refrigerator. Sold in 4-ounce packages at Whole Foods and Trader Joe's stores nationwide. For more information, call 415-331-8271 or see www.epicroots.com.

Boomerang corkscrew cuts foil safely



The sharp and somewhat clumsy foldout knife on a waiter's corkscrew scares some of us off from using the tool to cut the capsule of a wine bottleneck. Foil cutters are a safe option, but they're small and often get buried in the tangle of a utensil drawer. *Fine Cooking* senior editor Amy Albert recommends the Boomerang corkscrew, which combines a corkscrew and a foil cutter in one small, reliable gadget. \$6.95 at Corkscrew Mart (www.corkscrewmart.com; 408-892-8900).

Avocado slicer cuts clean, even slices

Cutting a ripe avocado into perfect slices always poses a predicament—do you scoop or slice first? This nifty tool from Progressive International does both at the same time. The rounded metal bottom cuts right to the edge of the skin, while the twelve angled, interior bands cut the avocado half into long, neat slices for a pretty addition to a composed salad. \$14.95 at Cooking.com (800-663-8810).



Avocado oil for a sauté or a salad

It seems only natural that someone thought to press the buttery avocado into duty as an oil. Elysian Isle's version, made from New Zealand Haas avocados, has a distinct nutty flavor that livens up a vinaigrette. Its smoke point of 500°F makes it perfect for sautéing and frying, which lets you add a touch of richness to seared chicken breasts or stir-fried vegetables. Because Elysian Isle's oil is unrefined, it retains many of the avocado's nutritional properties. An 8½-ounce bottle is \$10.50 (www.nzimportsinc.com; 503-892-9500).



Applewood ham has a subtly smoky flavor

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Spring Lettuce

At the market or in your garden

BY RUTH LIVELY

About the time I tire of winter salads, spring comes to the rescue with a wide array of interesting lettuces. Because most lettuces love cool weather and are quick to grow, they're popular in farmers' markets around the country starting in late March and heading through May and early June. Specialty grocers and natural-foods stores often have a good supply of spring lettuce, and even some supermarkets are now offering more than just the usual suspects like romaine and green leaf lettuce.

But an even better—and easy—option is to grow your own; if you start sowing seeds now, you'll be cutting your own leaves in a month (see the sidebar at right).

Experiment with different varieties

Whether you're scouting markets or planting your own, be adventurous. Try as many lettuces as you can, alone or mixed in salads (see the ideas above); you'll find much better flavor and texture than the packages of mixed greens you find in supermarkets.

Among my favorite lettuces, some are loose-leaf types and others are heading lettuces; some are heirlooms and others are recent introductions. I choose them for their flavor, their colors and textures, and, since I grow my own, their heat-tolerance in the garden. Merlot is a beautiful ruffled burgundy loose-leaf with lime-green ribs. Oak leaf lettuces come in both green and red, and are as attractive as they are tasty. Black-Seeded Simpson is an old-timer with bright lime-green ruffled leaves. Mer-

Salad inspiration

COMPLEMENT A SALAD OF MILD-FLAVORED LETTUCES

like butter and loose-leaf varieties by using nut oils in your dressing. Walnut and hazelnut oils are my favorites (especially paired with sherry vinegar). Hazelnut oil is more costly and seems to have a shorter life, but it often packs a lot more flavor than walnut oil. Finish the salad with some aged goat cheese, a few shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano, and some toasted nuts.

FOR CRISPER LETTUCES, USE A BOLDLY FLAVORED DRESSING,

like a balsamic-pesto vinaigrette. For romaine, Batavian, or very crisp leaf lettuces like Deer Tongue, I'll opt for a Caesar-style dressing. For an easy, pseudo-Caesar dressing, stir together 1 chopped anchovy fillet, 1 minced garlic clove, 3 tablespoons olive oil, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and about 2 tablespoons grated Parmigiano.

MY FAVORITE WEEKNIGHT SPRING

SALAD is a mix of various lettuces—as many different colors and textures as I can muster—dressed with a little red-wine vinegar, olive oil, a bit of Dijon mustard, salt, and pepper. A blend of 1 tablespoon vinegar and 3 tablespoons oil is usually enough for three large or four modest servings of salad.

MAKE COMPOSED DINNER SALADS

when salad greens are going strong in the garden. Toss the lettuces with your favorite vinaigrette and mound on dinner plates. Arrange cold sliced potatoes, leftover grilled meat or fish or good-quality canned tuna, hard-cooked eggs, cooked vegetables, sliced tomatoes, sautéed or raw mushrooms, or a combination. Make extra vinaigrette to drizzle on top and pass at the table.

FOR A WARM SALAD, TRY BATAVIAN LETTUCES.

Slice them thinly across the head, wash and dry, and then dress with a warm bacon and shallot vinaigrette. Or use as a base for a salad of warm potatoes and sausage.



Bistro Salad with Warm Goat Cheese

Serves four.

I like a combination of butter lettuce and a few different-colored loose-leaf lettuces for this salad. You'll notice I call for "handfuls" of lettuce, as this is the way I make salad at home, and it's a good practice to learn to eyeball the right size salad. If you like, you can substitute walnuts for the hazelnuts and walnut oil for the hazelnut oil.

Cooking spray

½ cup toasted hazelnuts (skinned, if you like)

4-ounce log fresh goat cheese

1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

3 tablespoons hazelnut oil

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

4 generous loose handfuls of small lettuce leaves (or large ones torn up) from a variety (three is nice) of loose-leaf and butter lettuces (about 6 lightly packed cups), washed and thoroughly dried

Heat the oven to 400°F and lightly coat a baking sheet with cooking spray. Roughly chop half of the hazelnuts and finely chop the other half. Slice the goat cheese into four equal portions (if the slices crumble a bit, simply pat the cheese back together into a sort of patty). Press the finely chopped hazelnuts into the cheese rounds to coat them on all sides. Set the rounds on the baking sheet and bake until heated, about 6 to 8 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, oil, a big pinch of salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Taste and adjust the seasonings. When the cheese is ready, toss the lettuce with the dressing in a large bowl until the leaves are evenly coated. Mound the lettuce on individual plates, top with a round of warm goat cheese, and scatter the nuts all over.

Ruth Lively, formerly the senior editor of Kitchen Gardener, is a contributing editor to Fine Gardening magazine. ♦

Harvest your own salad greens in a month



lights, or wait until the ground thaws and start your seeds outdoors. In my zone 6 Connecticut garden, I start my spring salad garden outdoors in April, and I plant again in late August for fall salads.

If space is a concern, grow loose-leaf lettuces. Loose-leaf, or cutting lettuces, are more space-efficient than heading lettuces, which need about 8 inches of room in all directions. (Loose-leaf lettuces can be grown much closer together—even in a pot or windowsill).

To start a loose-leaf lettuce patch, scratch the surface of the soil to rough it up slightly, then scatter seeds evenly over the surface, as if you were

sprinkling salt. Sift a little more soil over the surface and water gently with a spray bottle. Lettuce seeds should start germinating within a few days, and in three to four weeks, you'll be harvesting. To keep the harvest going as long as possible, don't cut the whole lettuce, but rather pick individual leaves from around the outside of each plant. Or you can cut an area of the planting with scissors, being careful to cut about 1 inch above the crown. If you pick this way, the lettuce will keep producing until hot weather finally causes the plant to bolt (go to flower), at which point the leaves become unpalatably bitter.

Salad greens are easy and quick to grow and don't take much space. You don't even need a garden; a windowbox or outdoor container works just fine. In spring, you can buy already-started lettuce plants, but you'll have more choice if you begin with seeds (see p. 80). You can start the seeds indoors with grow

veille de Quatre Saisons (also called Four Seasons) is a French heirloom with deep-red crinkled leaves. Deer Tongue is another heirloom with wrinkled, pointed green leaves and a good, crisp texture. My favorite romaines are speckled, like Freckles, or red, like Rouge d'Hiver. Buttercrunch is one of many good butterheads. Batavian lettuces, European favorites that are beginning to get a following here, form large, crisp heads of ruffled leaves. They're beautiful, deli-

cious, and very heat tolerant. (Seeds for these varieties and others are available in nurseries and by mail-order; see p. 80.)

Whether you grow your own lettuce or buy it, be sure to wash it well. Nothing ruins a salad like gritty greens or bits of decayed leaves. Swish the leaves in a large bowl of cool water, let them sit so the grit settles to the bottom, and then lift out the leaves. Repeat until no grit remains and then spin them dry (for information on spinners, see p. 24).

What's the shelf life of flour? What's the best way to store it? And does whole-wheat flour need special storage?

—Jessica Black,
New York, New York

A Dave Anderson replies: White flour can be stored for up to a year at room temperature. Keep it in an airtight container to prevent the flour from becoming susceptible to flour beetles and other kitchen pests. For long-term storage, white flour will keep indefinitely in the freezer or refrigerator, packed in airtight containers or freezer bags.

Unlike white flour, whole-wheat flour can become stale and rancid because of oils in the germ. Whole-wheat flour will last for three months at room temperature, six months in the refrigerator, and a year in the freezer. Thus, store it in the freezer if you're not going to use it up quickly. As with white flour, keep it in airtight containers or freezer bags.

Flour won't freeze solid like a block, but obviously it will become cold. Take it out of your freezer a few hours before you plan to bake with it so that its temperature won't affect other ingredients, like yeast or baking powder.

*Dave Anderson is the brand manager
at King Arthur Flour Company
in Norwich, Vermont.*

What's the best cut of beef for stir-frying?

—Katie Sawatsky,
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

A Bruce Aidells replies: I rarely order stir-fried beef in Chinese restaurants because many chefs soak the meat in a baking-soda solution, which gives it a soft, spongy texture that I dislike. Home cooks have a great advantage when stir-frying beef because they can eliminate this baking-soda treatment and also choose the best cuts.

I suggest flavorful types of beef for stir-frying, ones that marry well with standard Asian ingredients like soy, ginger, garlic, and chile paste, and that will be tender when sliced into thin strips.

Flank steak, the preferred cut of many Chinese cookbook writers, fits these requirements perfectly. It's lean

but flavorful and sufficiently tender when cut across the grain. It's also quick to prepare since there's no gristle or fat to trim. New York strip and sirloin are two other flavorful cuts, although they're slightly more expensive and need to be trimmed of fat.

Some obvious qualities eliminate other cuts. Rib-eye has plenty of flavor but too many fatty patches. Eye-of-the-round and bottom round are too tough, and tenderloin is pricey and, to my mind, lacks the desired beefy flavor.

*Bruce Aidells is a co-author of
The Complete Meat Cookbook.*

My wife and I disagree about what salt we should use for cooking. While I prefer kosher salt, she worries about the lack of iodine in our diet if we use uniodized salt. Any suggestions?

—Robert Penney, via e-mail

A Karen Duester replies: I would side with you and say that you're probably safe opting for the additive-free kosher salt over the iodized salt, which is a fine-grained refined salt with iodine (sodium iodide or potassium iodide) added to it.

Iodine is an essential nutrient and part of two hormones—T3 and T4—released by the thyroid gland, that, among other things, regulate body temperature, metabolic rate, and nerve and muscle function. When iodine intakes are either inadequate or too great, the thyroid gland enlarges and a goiter develops.

The Food & Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences, however, recommends a very small intake of iodine (only 150 micrograms per day for adults). This small amount is typically met by consuming seafood (such as clams, lobsters, oysters, and sardines) and vegetables grown in iodine-rich soil. Other dependable sources of iodine include dairy products from cows fed iodine-containing medications, breads baked with dough conditioners, and even the sea mist in coastal areas.

Iodine intake has a rather wide margin of safety—the average consumption of iodine in the United States exceeds minimum recommendations.

*Karen Duester, MS, RD, a registered dietitian, is
the president of The Food Consulting Company
in Del Mar, California. ♦*

Do you have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

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READER SERVICE NO. 91

Taking salad spinners for a whirl

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

All salad spinners are fundamentally alike, consisting of a basket that spins inside a covered bowl, cleverly relying on centrifugal force to fling away unwanted moisture. This is quite handy since sodden lettuce readily wilts, and any vinaigrette will slip off damp greens and pool at the bottom of your salad bowl. Spinners are also useful for drying cooking greens, such as spinach or chard, and fresh herbs, which when wet are difficult to chop and mince and are more likely to bruise.

Yet despite the similarities, all salad spinners don't perform alike, as we found after testing nine models. Some are decisively better. We tested models that operated by a crank, pull cord, pump, lever, and (thanks to batteries and electricity) the mere press of a button. While the mechanism for spinning certainly influenced how much "oomph" went into the spin, another influencing factor was the shape and size of the basket. The smaller the basket or the more tapered at the base, the more crammed the lettuce—and the more difficult for water to escape.

How the tests worked

We rated the spinners based on how easy they were to use and how well they dried greens. After spinning a medium (5-ounce) head of washed curly-leaf lettuce, we weighed the amount of water that remained clinging to the leaves and noted visual observations, such as how evenly dry the greens were.

With the best spinners, just three to four teaspoons of water were left clinging to the head of lettuce. As a result, the leaves were still slightly moist but not wet—perfectly fit for a salad. The less effective spinners tended to retain another teaspoon or two of water, not a terribly significant difference. Their main faults were that they were difficult to operate or didn't dry the greens evenly (or both). Here's a rundown of our favorites.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large. ♦



Top pick

Oxo Salad Spinner

\$25

www.oxo.com

PROS: This innovative spinner boasts a comfortable pump for activating spin. The downward pressure also negates the need for bracing the spinner in place, and the pump locks into place for easy storage. Other perks include a nonskid base (you can even walk away while it's still spinning) and a brake (that little black button on the lid) to halt spinning.

CONS: No complaints.

BUYING TIPS

When choosing a salad spinner, consider these features:

- ❖ Choose a spinner that's roomy enough for your needs. Our favorites were large enough to accommodate the leaves from a medium-size head of lettuce.
- ❖ Avoid spinners with strongly tapered bowls or baskets. A narrower base means the greens will be crammed and makes it difficult for water to escape.



Runner-up

Zyliss Salad Spinner

\$19.99

www.cooking.com

PROS: The pull cord spins the basket in one direction as the cord is pulled out and then quickly jerks the basket in the reverse direction as the cord winds back in. This jostles and loosens the leaves, so they aren't pressed flat against the basket, which can trap water. The bowl is pleasingly large and wide, and the cord handle fits snug into the lid for convenient storage.

CONS: Like a yo-yo, if your cord unravels (which does happen), you have to manually rewind it. The yo-yo effect is also a little abrupt and requires you to firmly brace the bowl.



Best buy

Copco Salad Spinner

\$9.99

www.bedbathandbeyond.com

PROS: We liked the deep bowl and its overall no-nonsense design. The finger grip on the lid makes for a comfortable hold to brace the spinner in place.

CONS: If you want a spinner that can double as a serving bowl, this is no looker.



Showstopper

Norpro Salad Spinner

\$49.75

www.cooksmarket.com

PROS: Like the Zyliss, the pull cord reverses the direction of the basket mid-spin, so that the leaves are jostled from being pressed flat against the basket's sides. The attractive stainless-steel bowl doubles as a serving or mixing bowl. The large ring handle on the pull cord is comfortable to grip.

CONS: It's expensive, and the basket rotates on a disk that sits unattached in the base of the bowl—an easy component to misplace.

- ❖ Be sure that the lid fits snugly without being awkward to fit, and that the mechanism for activating the spin (crank, cord, lever) does its job with ease.
- ❖ Most salad spinners require bracing the unit in place with one hand as you spin with the other. Just make sure it's not too much of a battle.

- ❖ Avoid spinners with a flow-through lid, designed to clean greens by running tap water through it. We found the best way to get the grit out of greens is by soaking them in the sink or a large bowl full of cold water.
- ❖ A nonskid base is a real perk, although among our favorites, only one model—the Oxo—featured this.

- ❖ Keep it manual. The electric-powered spinner we tested was more trouble than it was worth—and its "worth" was quite steep. We found the battery-powered model to be similarly at fault.
- ❖ Avoid perforated bowls where the water automatically drains out the bottom. This limits you to using the spinner in the sink, which is likely to be occupied.

Does cooking boost or bust nutrients in vegetables?

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

Which do you think delivers more nutrients—a raw carrot or a cooked one? If you're like most people, you'd probably pick the raw one. And you'd be wrong. Contrary to popular belief, some vegetables actually benefit nutritionally from cooking. It's also true that cooking can destroy certain nutrients. And you might be surprised to learn that in some cases, cooking doesn't make that much of a difference at all.

Even before you've settled on whether to steam or sauté, some significant nutrient loss may have already occurred

Another generally unrecognized fact is that the nutrient content of a particular kind of vegetable (or fruit) can vary immensely. One grapefruit can contain 200 times more vitamin A than another. Genetic differences among varieties account for some of this range, but growing conditions, the time of harvest, and handling and storage conditions are also factors. For example, snap beans build up their stash of vitamin C and carrots develop more beta-carotene as they mature. Some produce, such as spinach, can lose up to half its total vitamin C in 24 hours if it isn't refrigerated. So be aware that even

before you've settled on whether to steam or sauté, some significant nutrient loss may have already occurred.

The raw truth

Salads and fresh vegetable dishes are of course wonderfully healthy, but when I hear about people who adamantly eat only raw vegetables, I get worried. Some vegetables actually become more nutritious after cooking. For carrots, cooking softens its firm cell structure—we can access many more carotenes and minerals and more vitamin C in tender cooked carrots than we can by simply chewing raw, crunchy ones.

Corn is another example of how cooking can unlock nutri-

shells, lye, or limestone), as some cultures that lived predominantly on corn did, the lysine converts to a usable form. Today, we get our lysine from other food sources.

Finally, I think it's interesting to note that from an evolutionary standpoint, cooking vegetables has had important consequences. According to Dr. Richard Wrangham, a professor of anthropology at Harvard University, cooking allowed the development of a larger brain. Cooking made plant foods, particularly starchy tubers such as potatoes and manioc, softer and easier to chew and substantially increased their available energy. This greater food intake enabled *Homo erectus* to develop a larger brain.

How to preserve the most nutrients during cooking

So how much damage really occurs to nutrients when you boil or steam or sauté or roast vegetables? It's difficult to say exactly, but the differences among various cooking methods isn't as great as you might think. For minerals like iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium, and sodium, the loss is only in the range of 5 to 10 percent no matter how the vegetable is cooked. Vitamin loss, on the other hand, can be much higher, although many vegetables (such as tomatoes, eggplant, asparagus, and green beans) retain 80 percent or more of their vitamins regardless of the cooking method.

For minerals, the loss is only in the range of 5 to 10 percent no matter how the vegetable is cooked

ents. Corn contains lysine, one of the essential amino acids (which is a building block of proteins), but it's in a form that our bodies can't use. By cooking corn with a strong alkali (such as ashes, burnt

Nutrients escape from vegetables in two ways: by getting dissolved in the cooking water or by getting destroyed by heat.

Water-soluble compounds (which include vitamin C and some B vitamins) are the most vulnerable to loss from boiling, simmering, steaming, or braising. The simplest way to minimize the loss of these nutrients is to choose a cooking method that doesn't involve water, or to cook vegetables in a way that the cooking liquid remains part of the dish, as it does in a casserole or a braise.

When you do choose to boil vegetables, adding them to the water after it has come to a full boil (as you would when blanch-

ing) minimizes the loss of vegetables from the Brassica family (broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower, for example) will become very strong tasting.

Rapid cooking can help preserve some thiamine and vitamin C, which are the most susceptible to destruction by heat. Stir-frying and sautéing, both fast methods, are good techniques for minimizing nutrient loss as well as for keeping green vegetables bright. Another tip is to cut vegetables into smaller pieces to reduce the cooking time.

Cooking has little detrimental effect on the nutritive value of carotenoids, which are precursors to vitamin A found in orange and yellow vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, and rutabagas. Carotenoids (beta-carotene is one example) are also found in red vegetables like tomatoes and in dark-green vegetables like broccoli and spinach. Studies suggest that cooking may even boost this nutrient in some cases.

Carotenoids deteriorate with lengthy exposure to oxygen. Dried carrot chips, for example, lose their beta-carotene when packaged in air but retain it when packaged with nitrogen.

Keeping it in perspective. When it's time to start cooking, I'm thinking about food as more than just sustenance. For me, the decision of how to cook my vegetables includes things like flavor, appearance, time, and which method my family prefers. After all, it doesn't matter how nutritious your vegetables are if you can't get anyone to eat them.

Shirley O. Corriher is a food scientist, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, and the author of the award-winning book, CookWise. ♦

Stir-frying and sautéing are good techniques for minimizing nutrient loss

ing) minimizes the loss of vitamin C. If you start them in cold or warm water, enzymes in the vegetables become very active—at boiling temperatures, the enzymes are deactivated. Some of these enzymes are major destroyers of vitamin C, eliminating 20 percent of the vitamin within the first two minutes of cooking. Since blanching is a better way to cook many green vegetables, this method works out quite well.

Another way to moderately limit nutrient loss is to cook vegetables in a minimum of water with a lid, which reduces the loss of water-soluble vitamins and volatile nutrients. But be aware that the crisp green color of some vegetables will become drab, and

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Syrah

for Every Taste and Budget

BY TIM GAISER

After years of being overshadowed by Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, Syrah is finally gaining the popularity it deserves. And rightly so: Few other wines offer as much value and versatility, and such a broad range of styles—from vibrant rosés to light, fruity reds to concentrated, complex reds that age beautifully.

Classic Syrah has flavors and aromas that include blackberry and black raspberry, with pronounced floral, plummy, peppery, and earthy notes. It tends to be fairly tannic. With age, the best Syrahs take on remarkable complexity, losing the bright primary fruit of youth and gaining notes of exotic spices, fruit compote, and layers of earthiness that can be positively stunning.

From France, easy-drinking to powerful

A survey of the world's best Syrah has to start in France's northern Rhône Valley. The two tiny appellations of Côte-Rôtie and Hermitage produce what many consider to be the epitome of Syrah. These wines generally command a high price, as well they should: Farming the steep, sun-baked, rocky vineyards there is backbreaking work, and yields are small. St.-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage, and Cornas are other great Syrahs from the

northern Rhône that are worth seeking out.

Syrah is a vital component in southern Rhône blends, too, adding bouquet and structure to the finished wines; look for Vacqueyras, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and Lirac. And beyond the southern Rhône, there's lots of Syrah planted in southwestern France, often blended with Grenache with delicious results; Coteaux du Tricastin and Côtes du Lubéron are names to look for. Wines classified as Vin de Pays offer luscious fruit in an easy-drinking style; they're excellent values.

In Australia, it's Shiraz

Australia is the next stop on the Syrah tour. Shiraz, as it's known there (the most popular theory of Syrah's origins traces it to the ancient Middle Eastern city of Shiraz), is the most widely planted grape in Australia. The hardy varietal has been transformed in the hands of Australia's talented winemakers, who have mastered the art of blending Shiraz with other grapes from different areas of the country to achieve a wide range of styles. Traditionally, Australian Shiraz is known for extremely forward fruit and lavish oak. But increasingly the wines are starting to display the elegant, aromatic qualities of venerated

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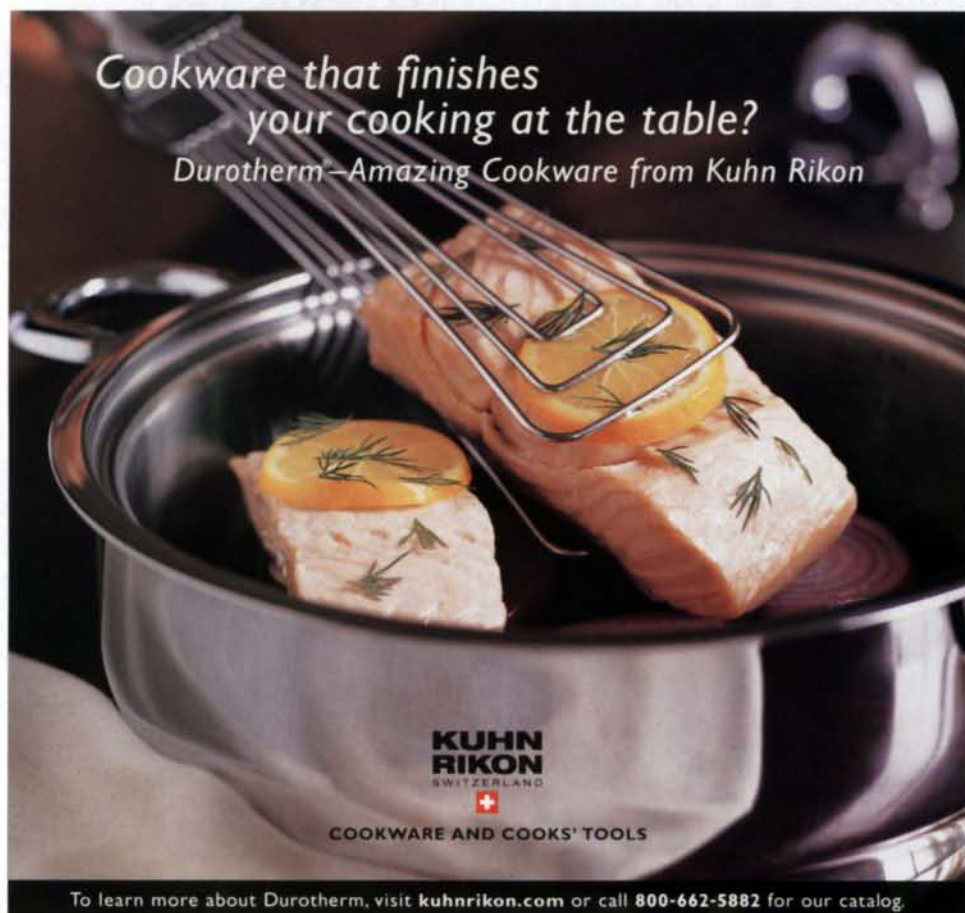
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top-notch French Syrahs. These days, Australian Shiraz comes in the widest possible range of styles, from deliciously fruity rosés to inky tannic monsters from century-old vineyards. There's one for everyone's taste and budget.

At U.S. vineyards and beyond, Syrah is catching on

California has been relatively late to jump on the Syrah bandwagon but is making up for lost time. The next few years will see a bevy of inexpensive, well-made Syrahs on the market from the Napa Valley, Sonoma, and Santa Barbara County.

Syrah is Washington State's current wine phenomenon, with a range of styles and general overall quality that's impressive and ever improving. More and more Syrah is being grown in South Africa and Chile, so expect an increasing number of good values from there in the next few years.

Try Syrah with grilled fish, burgers, and sharp cheeses

With such a wide range of styles, Syrah is one of the most versa-

Syrahs to love <i>Retail prices are approximate.</i>	
France <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 2001 Domaine de l'Ameillaud Vin de Pays d'Oc, \$7 ❖ 2001 Mas Grand Plagniol Rosé, Costières de Nîmes, \$10 ❖ 1999 Guigal Crozes-Hermitage, \$14 ❖ 2000 Domaine le Sang des Cailloux Vacqueyras, Cuvée Azalaïs, \$20 ❖ 1999 Guigal Côte-Rôtie, \$49 ❖ 1999 Chapoutier Hermitage "La Sizeranne," \$70 	Australia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Penfolds Rawson's Retreat Shiraz, South Australia, \$9 ❖ 2001 Rosemount Estate Shiraz, \$12 ❖ 2001 Wolf Blass Red Label Shiraz-Cabernet, South Australia, \$14 ❖ 2000 Wolf Blass Presidents Selection Shiraz, South Australia, \$20 ❖ d'Arenberg The Dead Arm Shiraz, McLaren Vale, \$55
California <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 2001 Delicato Shiraz, \$7 ❖ 2000 Midi Syrah, Dry Creek Valley, \$15 ❖ 2000 Jekel Vineyards Syrah, Monterey, \$16 ❖ 1999 Ojai Vineyards Syrah, Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Barbara County, \$38 ❖ 1999 Terre Rouge Syrah "Ascent," Sierra Foothills, \$75 	

tile of all red wines. Pair Syrah rosé with cheeses and other light picnic fare, or serve it as an apéritif with savory appetizers. Price is a major arbiter of style with Syrah. Have the light, less expensive, easy-to-drink reds with simple dishes such as ribs, burgers, chicken or pork with a spice rub, or even full-flavored grilled swordfish or tuna. More substantial Syrahs—generally older, pricier ones—do well paired with pastas with meat sauces and with meats like lamb, duck, beef, and venison, a personal favorite. (Just be sure there's no fruit in the dish; any sweetness will throw the wine out of whack.)

As with most other reds, serve Syrah at 65°F—if it's too warm, the wine's fruit will be overwhelmed by alcohol and tannin. It's fine to chill the lighter reds slightly. Decant and pour bigger, more tannic wines 30 minutes or longer before serving. Glassware isn't a critical issue with the rosés and lighter reds, but a fine aged Syrah needs a good crystal glass with an egg-shaped bowl that holds at least 15 ounces—otherwise, most of the grape's wonderful aromatics will be lost.

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier. He lives in San Francisco. ♦

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From Vietnam, sweet-salty braised chicken

Vietnamese Chicken with Ginger

Serves six.

I like to serve this with jasmine rice and sautéed broccoli. Skin-on chicken is traditional, but you can also use skinless chicken thighs or just spoon off the excess fat from the sauce before serving.

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons water
2½ ounces Chinese brown sugar
 (about 1 plank) or ⅓ cup
granulated white sugar
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium shallot, thinly sliced
into rings (a scant ¼ cup)
1½ ounces fresh ginger,
unpeeled and cut into
matchsticks (about ½ cup)
3 pounds skin-on chicken
thighs, excess fat trimmed,
cut in halves crosswise with
a cleaver or by your butcher,
and seasoned generously
with kosher salt

3 tablespoons fish sauce
½ teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
½ teaspoon dried red chile
flakes
3 scallions (whites and
greens), thinly sliced into
rings, for garnish

Have ready ½ cup water. If using Chinese brown sugar, put it and 2 tablespoons water in a 10-inch straight-sided skillet over medium heat. Stir frequently with a wooden spoon, chopping up the sugar with the spoon until it dissolves completely, 4 to 5 minutes. (If using white sugar, put it—without the water—in a 10-inch straight-sided skillet over medium. Cook until it starts to melt at the edges and turn golden brown, about 5 minutes.)

Reduce the heat to medium low and continue cooking, stirring constantly if using brown sugar or gently swirling the pan if using white sugar, until the bubbling caramel darkens to a reddish brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and, with your face averted to avoid steam and spatters, carefully pour the ½ cup water into the pan. The caramel may harden; if it does, set the pan over medium-high heat and stir until it dissolves. Stir the liquid to blend in the caramel and pour it into a heatproof measuring cup or bowl.

Wipe out the pan and heat the olive oil over medium high. Add the shallot and ginger and cook, stirring frequently, until they're softened and starting

to brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a bowl.

Set the skillet back over high heat. Add the seasoned chicken pieces and cook until they lose their raw color on the outside, about 2 minutes per side; the pan will be crowded and the chicken needn't brown. Stir in the fish sauce, salt, pepper, chile flakes, and reserved caramel. Reduce the heat to medium and cook at a vigorous simmer, turning the chicken every few minutes, until the chicken is cooked through (cut into a piece to check), about 20 minutes. Stir in the reserved ginger and shallot and cook for 3 to 4 minutes to blend the flavors. Transfer to a serving plate and garnish with the scallion rings.

I left Vietnam thirty years ago, but I still cherish its foods. One of my favorites is a braised chicken and ginger dish that transforms a few simple ingredients (chicken thighs, ginger, fish sauce, and sugar) into a succulent, savory dish of sweet and salty chicken laced with fragrant strands of ginger. I use a classic Vietnamese braising method called *kho* (pronounced KAW) that uses caramelized sugar as the base for the braising liquid and foundation flavor plus fish sauce to complete the sweet-salty profile. You might think at first that chicken and sugar are an odd match, but just think of the sweet and salty play of flavors in a traditional barbecue sauce.

The caramel sauce for *kho* is easy to make by boiling Chinese brown sugar (see the box at right) and water until the liquid is dark brown, almost the color of dark maple syrup. The caramel turns the chicken a rich, deep amber brown and supplies a mellow sweetness to the whole dish. In Vietnam, cooks pay close attention to the color of the *kho*. If the sugar doesn't caramelize enough, the meat will be pale ("like a ghost's eye") and earn the cook a scolding. If it's overcooked, the sauce will taste bitter.

The recipe at left is a delicious example of *kho*, but this braising technique isn't limited to chicken. The method can be used with almost any type of poultry, meat, or seafood, and the dish can be made spicy or not, depending on the region and on the cook's taste. The South Vietnamese like to add hot chiles to their seafood *kho*, while the North Vietnamese prefer it milder and less salty.

When I was growing up in the northern city of Hanoi, meat and seafood were very expensive, so home cooks would use *kho* to add lots of flavor to a dish and to stretch the family's food budget. Because meals always included a large pot of soup, plenty of rice, and several vegetable sautés, one chicken chopped into small pieces easily fed ten people.

Thai Moreland was born and raised in Vietnam. She moved to the United States in 1973 with her husband and daughter and now lives in New York City. ♦

Ginger

Fresh ginger appears frequently in Vietnamese dishes, although usually it's used in smaller amounts than in the recipe here. For this dish, I'm partial to young ginger (also called baby ginger) with its translucent skin and mild, sweet flesh, but it can be hard to find (I usually see it only in springtime in Asian markets). The more mature ginger you'll find at the supermarket works equally well; the dish will just have a spicier, more pungent bite. Choose ginger with smooth, firm skin and avoid soft, wrinkled, or moldy pieces. Regardless of its age, ginger is seldom peeled by Vietnamese cooks; it's just scrubbed well and smashed with a mortar and pestle and then added to a dish. But I prefer to julienne the ginger as thinly as possible for a more elegant presentation. The thin strips break up the fibrous flesh, so even older ginger becomes more tender.



Chinese brown sugar

Made from unrefined cane sugar, Chinese brown sugar is the behind-the-scenes ingredient that gives *kho* and other Vietnamese braises their deep, complex flavor. (Don't confuse it with palm sugar, which looks similar but is a very different product.) I buy this sugar at Asian food markets (or see *Where to Buy It*, p. 80) in 1-pound bricks that separate into wafers. It may also be called brown sugar in pieces or brown sugar candy. I store it in an airtight jar in my pantry, and it seems to keep forever. You can substitute white granulated sugar (not regular brown sugar) instead and cook it until it turns to caramel, and the dish will still be delicious.

Fish sauce

Fish sauce (*nuoc mam*; pronounced nook MUM) is as vital to Vietnamese cuisine as soy sauce is to Chinese cuisine. If you didn't grow up knowing its intensely pungent smell, you might find its odor off-putting (some say it smells like wet socks). Don't worry; it doesn't taste offensive. In fact, its salty, fermented flavor can be much more subtle than you'd expect.

This clear amber liquid is made by layering small anchovies or other tiny fish with sea salt in large tanks and letting them ferment in the sun for up to 18 months. The finest fish sauce comes from the first pressing of the fish. When buying fish sauce (in Asian food markets, or see p. 80), look for big glass bottles labeled *nuoc mam nhi*—the word *nhi* indicates the highest quality. I prefer Viet Huong Three Crabs brand, which tastes clean, complex, and slightly sweet. Fish sauce keeps indefinitely in the pantry.

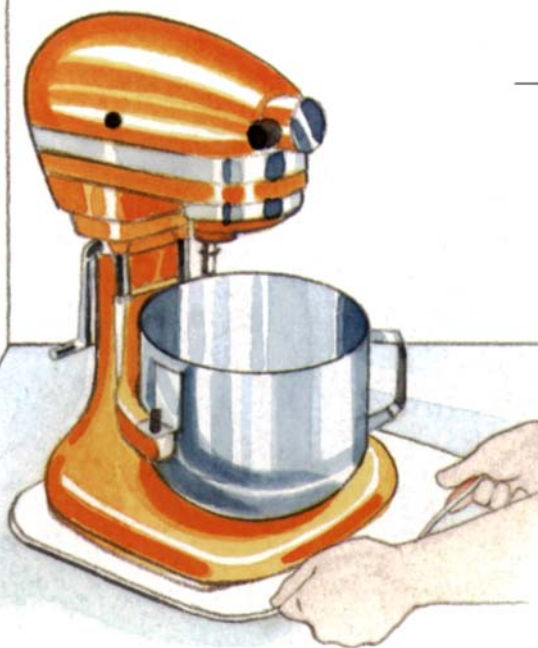
Quick Dipping Sauce

Yields about 1/4 cup.

Here's a quick little dipping sauce that uses fish sauce. Try it with steamed or boiled shellfish.

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon fish sauce**
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon water**
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar**
- 3 quarter-size slices fresh ginger, smashed in a mortar**

Stir all the ingredients together in a small bowl.



WINNING TIP

Use a flexible mat to move appliances

I love my heavy-duty stand mixer but hated having to drag or lift the heavy thing from the back corner of my kitchen counter to the front so I could use it. The mixer also left scratches on my tile counter each time I moved it, so I took a thin, flexible plastic chopping mat (the ones that cost only a couple of dollars) and slid it under the appliance to cushion my counter. The mat I bought is a translucent white, so it barely shows against the tiles. My mixer now rests in its corner on the mat, and all I have to do is grab the mat to glide the mixer to the front. Then, when I'm done, I just push the mat to slide the mixer back into the corner again. A word of caution: Don't leave your mixer unattended while it's running, and if you have a long mixing job to do, remove the mat so the mixer can rest securely on the counter.

—James Kerr, via e-mail

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Reheating cooked pasta

When I'm cooking pasta in a pot that comes with a strainer insert, I pull the insert out once the pasta has finished cooking and rest it at an angle on top of the pot, above the pasta cooking water, while I finish cooking the sauce. A few minutes later when my sauce is complete, I briefly dip the pasta insert back into the still-hot cooking water and drain it quickly to reheat the pasta and keep it from sticking together.

—Gary Anderson, via e-mail

Use evaporated milk instead of cream

Once when a recipe called for heavy cream and I didn't have any on hand, I substituted canned evaporated whole milk and was pleasantly surprised by the taste. The dish tasted lighter

and more complex, with a slightly sweet, nutty flavor. Now I use evaporated milk in place of heavy cream in quiches, sauces, and potato gratins, especially when the ingredients include cheese. The lighter taste actually highlights the flavor of the cheese.

—Kara Adanalian, via e-mail

Cook stock outside for a cleaner kitchen

I like to gently simmer my turkey, beef, and veal stocks for several hours to reduce and concentrate the liquid, but my kitchen always gets steamy and greasy from fatty vapors coming off the stock, and my noisy exhaust fan did a poor job of venting the odors. Now I simmer my stocks outside on the patio, using a portable electric burner

on a sturdy table covered with heatproof padding. To prevent injuries, I always make sure there are no kids or dogs around the house or in the backyard. Now my kitchen stays clean, cool, and odor free.

—S. Groves, via e-mail

Proofing yeast in one easy step

I bake bread and pizza quite often, and I recently found a way to save washing an extra dish. When making the dough, I add all the dry ingredients—except the yeast—to the mixing bowl. I make a small well in the top and add the yeast to the well. Then I pour a small amount of measured warm water into the well, wait until the yeast and water mixture turns creamy and slightly foamy, and then con-



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tinue with the recipe. Even if the recipe doesn't require proofing, I find this technique helpful because it makes the yeast easier to incorporate.

—Lori Miller, via e-mail

Hearty croutons from hearth breads

If you like croutons made from dense-crumbed hearth breads but don't like the hassle of trying to cut a loaf into relatively uniform cubes, ask the baker to slice the loaf once, rotate it a quarter turn, and slice it again. You'll get a big bag of "batons" that can easily be broken into halves or thirds in just a few minutes. Then use the bread cubes in your favorite crouton recipe.

—Lena Sims,
San Diego, California

Seasoning with soy sauce

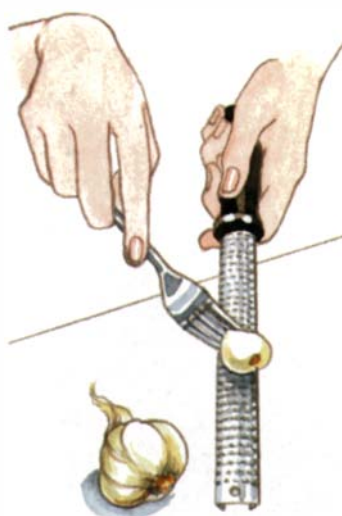
This Christmas, I received two olive oil misters and put one to a unique use. I filled the mist bottle with soy sauce and used it to evenly season stir-fries, eggs, and grilled foods. Instead of overseasoning food with soy sauce, I now have a light, consistent application of seasoning, and, like misting foods with oil, I now use less soy sauce.

—Gina DeVine,
Carrboro, North Carolina

Storing dish brushes out of sight

I've discovered a great place to store my sturdy vegetable and dish brushes; the dishwasher silverware basket. It's a logical and convenient place to stash those unsightly brushes and dish pads, and the brushes are always there and always clean from being run through the dishwasher with the soiled dishes. No more searching in the scary cabinet under the sink for my dishwashing tools.

—Denise Scott Jackson,
Grandville, Michigan



What to do when you're short on garlic

If I'm just short of the amount of garlic I need for a recipe, I fall back on the saying "the bigger the chunks of garlic, the gentler the flavor"—only I use it in reverse. I grate the garlic cloves on my Microplane grater, holding the garlic with a fork to keep my fingers away from the sharp blades; this gives me an intense garlic purée that yields maximum flavor, so two cloves of garlic can easily do the work of three. Just be sure not to burn the garlic when you start to cook.

—Marcy Brown,
Los Angeles, California

Make perfect pancakes with a baster

Turkey basters work great for batter distribution. Try using one for perfectly round, even pancakes and crêpes. Turkey basters are also handy for filling cupcake tins—equal batter distribution and no messy drips.

—Erinn Casale Michalek,
New York, New York

Scrub with a salt paste

I use a handful of kosher salt mixed with a few drops of water to scrub vegetables and fruits like skin-on potatoes, apples, citrus fruits, whole fish, and skin-on poultry. I treat the salt

like sandpaper to exfoliate the surface of the foods, and then I rinse them well under cold running water and blot dry with paper towels.

—Lorie Vu,
Las Vegas, Nevada

Labeling freezer bags neatly

I like to buy bulk packs of fresh meat and poultry and portion the meat into plastic bags to freeze. I always filled the plastic bags with meat first, and then with wet and sticky hands, I'd take a permanent marker and try to write the contents on the equally wet and sticky bags. It finally dawned on me that I was doing things backward. Now I write on the clean, empty bags first and *then* fill the bags.

—Madeline DeBlasi,
Stamford, Connecticut

Saving zested citrus fruit

After grating the zest from a lemon or other citrus fruit, the bare skin shrivels up and the fruit becomes hard and impossible to juice within just a day or two. A simple solution is to wrap the fruit tightly in plastic and then store it in the refrigerator. This prevents the fruit from drying out. I find that a completely zested lemon wrapped tightly in plastic will last for at least a week in the refrigerator.

—Leslie Revsin,
Bronxville, New York

Use a knife's spine to scrape food from a board

After slicing, dicing, or chopping your vegetables, turn your knife over and use the dull side of the blade to scrape the vegetables off the cutting board and into your pan or bowl. Your knife will stay sharp longer, and you won't be shaving tiny bits of plastic or wood from the cutting board onto your food.

—Jenna Roses Zinkus,
Boston, Massachusetts ♦



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READER SERVICE NO. 43

Matching Flavors and Methods with Salmon

BY PERLA MEYERS

With its bold, rich flavor and buttery texture, salmon can take on many personalities, depending on the seasoning and the cooking method.

Yet despite its versatility, salmon doesn't work with just anything. This fish is best paired with ingredients that can both highlight and temper its somewhat pronounced flavor. Today's farm-raised salmon (the kind most widely available in grocery stores, but not your only option; see the sidebar opposite) has a particularly fatty, almost marbled texture, so it takes well to assertive cooking methods, too.

Choose your cooking method first; then decide how you'll season your salmon. If you're going to broil, roast, or grill the fish, you'll want hearty seasonings, herbs, and vegetables, since the fatty flavors in salmon intensify with these methods and need to be balanced by other strong flavors. Rosemary and thyme, as well as many root vegetables, go well with broiled or roasted salmon. Bold Asian flavors, like sesame and

ginger, pair well with grilled salmon, whether in a sauce or a marinade.

When it's poached or braised, either on the stovetop or in the oven, salmon takes on a lighter, more delicate flavor, so use more delicately flavored herbs, as well as citrus fruits. And while cheese doesn't fare well with salmon because it's so rich and creamy, some dairy products, like sour cream and crème fraîche, actually tame and complement salmon's fishy flavor. I especially like those flavors with poached or braised salmon.

You also might want to consider how many people you're serving when deciding how to cook salmon. If you're cooking for a crowd, roasting or broiling several fillets together is easy; if it's just you and a guest or two, pan searing, à la minute, is a fine option. So while the Oven-Braised Salmon in Lemon-Tarragon Crème Fraîche on p. 43 or the Broiled Salmon with Lentil Ragoût on p. 40 are ideal entertaining dishes, I'd stick to one or two close friends when cooking the Salmon in Crispy Rice Paper on p. 42.



sweet & seared

Salmon in Crispy Rice Paper
with Sweet & Spicy Sake Essence



tangy & braised

Oven-Braised Salmon in
Lemon-Tarragon Crème Fraîche



Brochettes of Salmon & Mushrooms in
a Velvety Asian Marinade

aromatic & grilled



Broiled Salmon with a Ragout of
Lentils & Root Vegetables

earthy & broiled

Shopping for salmon

In years past, salmon was a specialty we enjoyed in summer and early fall. But farm-raising has changed that, making salmon available year-round, as well as less expensive. Salmon's health benefits (a high percentage of Omega-3 oils and vitamins A and B) have also helped make it popular. With so much salmon on the market, it helps to know what you're buying.

FARMED VS. WILD SALMON. You're most likely to find farmed salmon in your grocery store, but if you keep your eyes open (or ask for it), you might find wild salmon. Farmed salmon has a rich, fatty texture, while wild salmon has a leaner texture and a more complex flavor, so it mustn't be overcooked. Look for wild Alaskan salmon, which is available nationwide throughout the year.

CHECK FRESHNESS. Regardless of the type of salmon you buy, be sure it's fresh. Variations in color are natural, but no matter the hue, the skin is the best indicator of freshness: It should be shiny and silver. Also, the flesh shouldn't be "gapping" (flaking apart with apparent holes)—a sign of aging. If possible, buy your salmon from a reputable fish market. Look for fish with the skin on (it's freshest) and ask the fishmonger to remove it for you (or do it yourself; see p. 72.)

BUY A SIDE AND CUT YOUR OWN FILLETS. The recipes here call for fillets, which are cut from a side of salmon (steaks are cut from a whole fish). I like to buy part of a side and cut the fillets myself. For 6- to 7-ounce portions, cut strips 1 1/2 to 2 inches wide; cut wider pieces from the flatter part of the salmon side. If the side of salmon is very wide, cut it in half down the middle first and then cut square portions.

Broiled Salmon with a Ragoût of Lentils & Root Vegetables

Serves four.

For the lentil ragoût, you can be flexible with the ingredients. If I can't find smoked pork shoulder, I often use smoked turkey sausage.

FOR THE LENTILS:

1 cup dried small green French lentils (also called du Puy lentils)

6 ounces smoked pork shoulder butt, smoked pork hock, double-smoked bacon, or smoked turkey sausage, cut into large cubes

1 small onion, peeled and stuck with a clove

1 small carrot, peeled and halved

1 bouquet garni (a few sprigs fresh parsley, 2 sprigs fresh thyme, and 1 bay leaf)

FOR THE VEGETABLES:

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large carrot, peeled and cut into ¼-inch dice

2 small turnips (about 7 ounces total), peeled and cut into ¼-inch dice

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

½ cup finely diced bacon (2 thick slices)

1 tablespoon finely minced shallot

2 teaspoons finely minced garlic (about 4 medium cloves)

¾ cup reserved lentil broth

FOR THE SALMON:

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

4 skinless, center-cut salmon fillets (about 6 to 7 ounces each)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Minced fresh flat-leaf parsley for garnish

Ingredient note:

❖ Du Puy lentils are tiny green French lentils that hold their shape well when cooked and have a particularly nice earthy flavor. Look for them at Whole Foods and other natural-foods stores, or see p. 80 for mail-order sources.

Cook the salmon: Position an oven rack about 6 inches from the broiler and a second rack in the center of the oven. Heat the broiler on high. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and brush the foil lightly with some of the melted butter. Lay the salmon fillets,

skin side down, on the foil; brush the tops and sides generously with the remaining butter and season with salt and pepper. Broil the salmon on the upper rack until the top is nicely browned, about 8 minutes. It should feel fairly firm when pressed with a fingertip and be slightly translucent in the middle if flaked. It will continue to cook a bit on its own once out of the oven, but if it's still a little rare, turn off the broiler, immediately turn the oven on to 400°F, move the

baking sheet to the center rack, and shut the oven door. Bake the salmon until just done, 1 to 2 minutes. Mound the lentils and vegetables on warm dinner plates and set a fillet on top. Garnish with the parsley and serve at once.

WINE SUGGESTION:

Try a Pinot Noir that's light to medium on tannins and long on fruit, like the 2000 Pepperwood Grove from California (\$8) or the 2001 Coldstream Hills from Australia (\$17).

The earthy, smoky flavor of the lentil and root-vegetable ragoût is a classic flavor pairing for broiled salmon since it's assertive enough to stand up to the bold flavor of the fish.

Cook the lentils: In a large saucepan, combine the lentils, pork butt, onion, carrot, and bouquet garni and cover with water by 2 inches. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, until tender, 20 to 30 minutes. Reserve ¾ cup of the cooking liquid, drain the lentils, discard the vegetables and pork, and set the lentils aside.

Cook the vegetables: Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the carrot and turnips, season with salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and return the skillet to medium heat. Melt the butter, add the bacon, and cook until almost crisp. Transfer to paper towels with a slotted spoon and set aside. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat. Add the shallot and garlic to the pan and cook for 1 minute without browning. Add the reserved lentils, sautéed vegetables, bacon, and reserved lentil broth; simmer until the broth has been completely absorbed by the lentils, 3 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and keep warm.





Brochettes of Salmon & Mushrooms in a Velvety Asian Marinade

Serves six.

This flavorful marinated salmon pairs beautifully with the cilantro-flavored couscous at right. A sauté of zucchini and yellow peppers with a little basil would round out the meal.

¼ cup rice vinegar
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
2 large cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1 tablespoon seeded and minced fresh jalapeño
⅓ cup fruity olive oil
2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
3 to 6 drops Tabasco
2½ pounds skinless salmon fillets, cut into 1¼-inch cubes
48 small shiitake or cremini mushroom caps
½ medium white onion, peeled and cut into 1¼-inch squares
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Couscous with Cilantro & Melted Scallions (at right)
Roughly chopped cilantro for garnish

Combine the vinegar, soy sauce, ginger, garlic, sugar, and jalapeño in a medium bowl. Whisk in the olive oil, sesame oil, and Tabasco. Add the salmon cubes and mushroom caps. Toss to coat evenly, cover with plastic wrap, and marinate for 1 hour in the refrigerator, tossing occasionally. While the salmon is marinating, soak a dozen 12-inch wooden skewers in water.

Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire or heat a gas grill to medium high. (If your grill tends to be very hot, use medium heat, as the brochettes will cook unevenly if the heat is too high.) Remove the salmon from the marinade and loosely thread four salmon cubes alternating with four mushroom caps and four thin pieces of onion on each skewer. Sprinkle with a little salt and pepper and grill or broil in batches until browned and the salmon is almost opaque throughout, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Test by removing one piece of salmon and checking it for doneness; it should still be somewhat translucent in the center. Transfer the brochettes to warm dinner plates. Serve with the couscous and garnish with the cilantro.

WINE SUGGESTION:

A fruity, medium-bodied red without too much tannin will pair well with the flavors of the grilled salmon and the sesame in the marinade. Try the 2000 Castel del Remei Gotim Bru, a Tempranillo blend from the Costers del Segre region of Spain, or the 2001 Domaine de l'Oratoire St. Martin Côtes du Rhône (both \$12).

Couscous with Cilantro & Melted Scallions

Serves six.

This recipe can be put together in a matter of minutes. I keep a bunch of scallions in the vegetable bin at all times to add to mashed potatoes, couscous, and salads. If you remove all but 2 inches of the greens and store them

in a plastic bag, the scallions will keep for two weeks.

Test Kitchen tips:

❖ If your 2½ pounds of salmon doesn't yield 48 cubes exactly, just use more or fewer cubes per skewer.

❖ The couscous recipe is designed to use a 10-ounce box of couscous, the most commonly available size.

¼ cup unsalted butter
1 bunch scallions (whites and 2 inches of greens), minced (about ½ cup)
⅓ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro
10 ounces (1½ cups, or 1 box) couscous
3 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Juice of ½ lemon or lime

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over low heat, add the scallions, and cook, covered, until tender, about 8 minutes. Add the cilantro, couscous, broth, ¼ teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste. Stir, bring to a boil over high heat, cover, and remove from the heat. Set aside for 5 minutes. Fluff the couscous with a fork. Taste for salt, add a large grinding of pepper, and season with some of the lemon or lime juice.

Ginger and sesame oil work a subtle magic on salmon with just an hour of marinating. But don't marinate it any longer, as ginger's tenderizing effect will make the fish too soft.

How to wrap a fillet in rice paper



Completely immerse one round of rice paper in a bowl of warm water for a few seconds. Transfer to a work surface and let stand until pliable, about 30 seconds.



Set a salmon fillet in the center of the softened rice paper. Fold the paper over one long side of the fillet, and then fold the paper in over the two short sides.



Roll the fillet over until it's completely enclosed by the rice paper. Set it aside with the seam side down. Repeat with the remaining fillets.

The sweet and spicy sake reduction is also delicious with salmon pan-seared without the rice paper; the slightly salty quality of seared salmon is nicely balanced by the sweet essence.



Salmon in Crisp Rice Paper with Sweet & Spicy Sake Essence

Serves four.

To sear the salmon without the rice paper, follow the same directions for sautéing. Mirin (sweet Japanese rice wine) is available in the Asian food section of grocery stores.

FOR THE SAKE ESSENCE:

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sake
1 cup mirin
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
2 large cloves garlic, minced
½ teaspoon seeded and minced fresh serrano chile
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 tablespoons finely diced red bell pepper
2 tablespoons finely diced yellow bell pepper
2 tablespoons finely diced zucchini (skin side only)
2 tablespoons finely diced carrot
1 teaspoon soy sauce
2 teaspoons chopped fresh cilantro; more sprigs for garnish

FOR THE SALMON:

4 skinless salmon fillets (about 6 ounces each)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup canola oil
4 rounds rice paper (8 to 10 inches)

To make the sake essence: In a heavy, 2-quart saucepan, combine the sake, mirin, rice vinegar, ginger, garlic, and serrano, bring to a boil over high heat, and reduce to about ½ cup, 10 to 15 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the peppers, zucchini, and carrot until

crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Add the soy sauce and vegetables to the sake essence; set aside and keep warm.

Make-ahead tips:

❖ The sake essence can be made several hours ahead and kept covered at room temperature. Wait to sauté and add the vegetables until just before serving.

❖ The fillets can be wrapped in rice paper up to two hours ahead. Put them on a plate in a single layer without touching. Drape with a damp paper towel, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate until ready to cook.

To prepare the salmon:

Sprinkle both sides of each salmon fillet with salt and pepper and drizzle with a little of the vegetable oil, using 1 tablespoon total for the four fillets. Wrap each fillet in rice paper, following the photos at left.

Heat the remaining 3 tablespoons oil in a heavy, 12-inch skillet over medium to medium-high heat until it's hot and shimmering but not smoking. Put the wrapped fillets in the skillet *without touching* and sauté, turning to brown top and bottom, until the rice paper is golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes per side; don't overcook. (If the fillets are very thick, you can also brown the sides for 1 minute each, but most fillets will be cooked through—just barely opaque—if just the top and bottom are seared.) Transfer to paper towels and let drain.

Stir the chopped cilantro into the sake essence and spoon some onto each of four warm dinner plates. Put a salmon fillet in the center of each plate, top with a cilantro sprig, and serve at once.

WINE SUGGESTION:

This recipe calls for sake, which would make for delicious sipping with the finished dish, as well. Try Ginyushizuku Samurai Shoin (\$20) or Nigori Takara (\$18).

Test Kitchen tips

❖ In our test kitchen, we used an ovenproof skillet to make this salmon. If you have an enameled cast-iron baking dish or another heavy-duty flameproof baking dish, you can use that. Just be sure not to use Pyrex or another type of ceramic dish that isn't safe on direct stovetop heat.

❖ If you want to make your own crème fraîche, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 74.

The tanginess of
crème fraîche and
lemon juice are the
perfect counterpoints
for the rich, buttery
texture of the
braised salmon.

Oven-Braised Salmon in Lemon-Tarragon Crème Fraîche

Serves four.

The reduced pan juices from the salmon have a delicious tangy flavor similar to that of béarnaise sauce. Serve the salmon with spring peas or asparagus.

3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh tarragon
8 ounces (1 scant cup) crème fraîche
¼ cup unsalted butter; more for the parchment
2 tablespoons minced shallot
½ cup dry vermouth
4 skinless salmon fillets (6 to 7 ounces each), preferably center-cut
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Minced fresh dill or chives for garnish

Heat the oven to 350°F. Cut a piece of parchment to fit inside a large ovenproof skillet, sauté pan, or flameproof baking dish. Lightly butter one side of the parchment. Combine the lemon juice, tarragon, and crème fraîche in a small bowl and set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in the pan or baking dish over medium-high heat. Add the shallot and vermouth and reduce to a glaze; remove from the heat. Season the fillets with salt and pepper and arrange in

a single layer in the pan. Pour the crème fraîche mixture over the salmon, cover with the parchment, butter side down, and bake until the salmon is just opaque throughout, 18 to 20 minutes; don't overcook.

Transfer the salmon to a plate and keep warm. Put the pan over medium heat and reduce the sauce until it's thick enough to lightly coat a spoon. Remove from the heat, whisk in the remaining 2 tablespoons butter, and taste for salt and pepper. Put each salmon fillet on a warm dinner plate and spoon the sauce over each. Garnish with the dill or chives.

WINE SUGGESTION:

Try a crisp French Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc with little or no oak, such as the 2000 Chablis from Rolland Lavantureux (\$16) or the 2000 Domaine Chavet Menetou-Salon, a little-known Loire Sauvignon Blanc that's a good deal at \$14.



Perla Meyers is the author of many cookbooks, including the forthcoming Ask Perla: The 1000 Questions You Had in Cooking School and Never Got to Ask. ♦

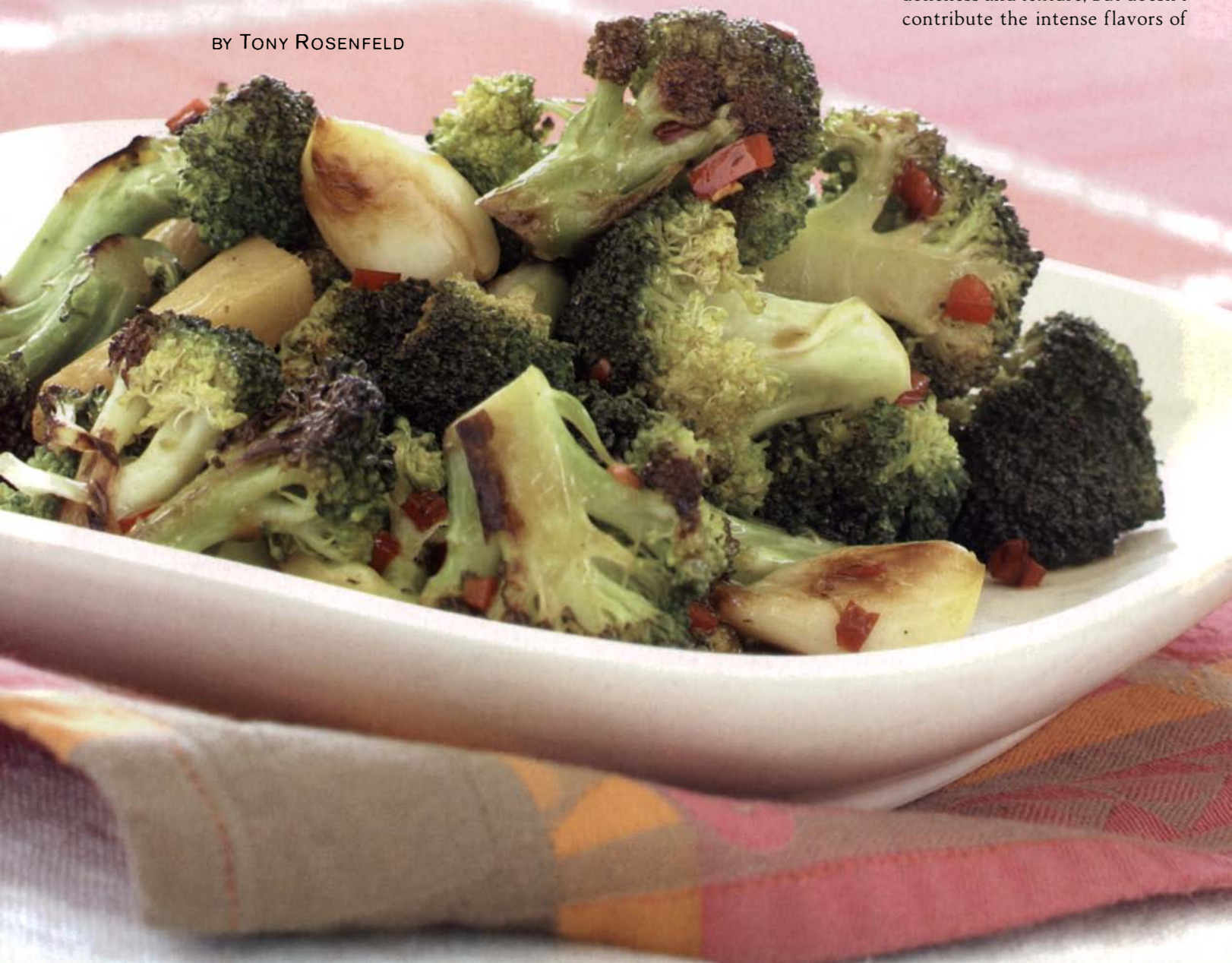
Sear & Steam Vegetables

Sauté vegetables for stir-fried flavor,
and then steam them—in the same pan—
to get the perfect texture

BY TONY ROSENFELD

I was very young when I announced (at the dinner table, no less) my preference for the crisp, spice-soaked broccoli from the local Chinese restaurant over the plain, steamed florets my mother often prepared. “Well, then, learn to make them yourself,” my mother sagely responded.

After playing around with broccoli and every variable of heat, I began to appreciate both my mom’s and the restaurant’s techniques. The crisp sear of a hot wok provides intense flavor, but the vegetable might shrivel or burn before it cooks all the way through. The measured timing of steaming allows for reliable doneness and texture, but doesn’t contribute the intense flavors of



sautéing. When the two techniques are combined—sautéing the vegetables first and then steaming them in a bit of water—the results are quick, colorful vegetable side dishes, perfectly cooked and flavorful, too. This technique works with many different vegetables and takes just as well to French and Italian seasonings as it does to Asian ones; see the sidebar on p. 47 for some ideas.

In these stir-fries, use large pieces of aromatics, like whole garlic cloves and thick, coin-shaped slices of shallots and ginger. They add flavor to the sauté without any worry of burning. The addition of water for steaming washes their flavor into the rest of the stir-fry and softens them. You can discard the garlic and

ginger at the end of cooking, if you like. The shallots break up into tasty thin brown rings.

Cut the vegetables uniformly and be sure the pan is hot. Follow the Chinese style of good vegetable preparation by cutting your vegetables into pieces of the same size so they'll cook evenly. Also, do all your prep work before you heat the pan. The cooking moves quickly, and it helps to have all your ingredients at the ready.

A sturdy, hot pan helps the vegetables caramelize. Heavy cast-iron or stainless-steel skillets sear vegetables efficiently, though a wok also works well. Be sure to turn on your exhaust fan, as the high heat in these recipes produces some smoke.



Crisp Asian Broccoli

Serves four as a side dish.

The fermented black beans are optional, but they add a wonderful salty kick. Look for them in Asian groceries, or for mail-order sources, see p. 80.

- 1 tablespoon soy sauce**
- 1 teaspoon rice vinegar**
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil**
- 3 tablespoons peanut or canola oil**
- 1 tablespoon fermented black beans, rinsed, dried, and coarsely chopped (optional)**
- Pinch dried red chile flakes**
- ¾ pound broccoli crowns, cut into medium florets**
- ¼ red bell pepper, finely diced**
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed**
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and quartered**
- Kosher salt**
- ¼ cup water; more if needed**

Combine the soy sauce, vinegar, sesame oil, and 1 tablespoon of the peanut oil in a small bowl; set aside. Turn on the exhaust fan and heat a heavy 12-inch skillet or large wok over high heat for 2 minutes. When the pan is hot, pour in the remaining 2 tablespoons peanut oil; a couple of seconds later, add the black beans (if using), the chile flakes, broccoli, red pepper, garlic, and ginger. Season the mixture well with salt and cook, tossing or stirring often, until the broccoli deepens to a dark green and browns in places, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, carefully add the water (it will steam), and cover the pan with the lid ajar. Cook until the broccoli softens but still has some crunch, about 4 minutes. (If the water evaporates before the broccoli is done, add more, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Stir the soy sauce mixture well and drizzle it over the broccoli, toss well, and serve immediately.

Two easy steps to perfectly cooked vegetables



Sear for flavor

Use a heavy skillet and be sure it's very hot. The high heat caramelizes the vegetables, giving them a sweet, intense flavor.



Steam for texture

Add ¼ cup water to the seared vegetables and cover the pan. The liquid deglazes the browned bits in the pan and steams the vegetables until they're slightly softened but still crisp.



Seared Asparagus with Lemon & Parmesan Curls

Serves four as a side dish.

Although you can choose to keep the asparagus whole in this dish, it sears better when the spears are cut in half. Use a vegetable peeler or cheese slicer to shave the Parmigiano Reggiano into curls.

- ¼ teaspoon grated lemon zest**
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice**
- 2½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 pound large asparagus (about 16 spears), woody ends snapped off, spears peeled and cut in half crosswise**
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and smashed**
- 1 large shallot, cut into ¼-inch disks**
- Pinch dried red chile flakes**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup water; more if needed**
- 10 shavings (2 inches long) Parmigiano Reggiano**

Combine the lemon zest, lemon juice, and ½ tablespoon of the olive oil in a small bowl; set aside. Turn on the exhaust fan and heat a heavy 12-inch skillet or large wok over high heat for 2 minutes. When the pan is hot, pour in the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and a few seconds later, add the asparagus, garlic, shallot, and chile flakes. Season well with salt and pepper. Cook, shaking the pan often, until the asparagus begins to brown and starts to shrivel slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, carefully add the water (it will steam), and cover the pan with the lid ajar. Cook until the asparagus is just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. (If the water evaporates before the asparagus is done, add more, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Drizzle the lemon mixture over the asparagus. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer the asparagus to a small serving dish and top with the Parmesan curls. Serve immediately.



Balsamic-Glazed Green Beans

Serves four as a side dish.

Green beans (especially larger ones) can take a while to cook, so sear them well.

- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar**
- ½ teaspoon granulated sugar**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 10 ounces fresh green beans, trimmed**
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed**
- 1 shallot, cut into ¼-inch disks**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup water; more if needed**
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces**
- 1 tablespoon sliced almonds, toasted**

Combine 1 tablespoon of the balsamic vinegar with the sugar in a small bowl and mix well; set aside. Turn on the exhaust fan and heat a heavy 12-inch skillet or large wok over high heat for 2 minutes. When the pan is hot, pour in the oil and, a few seconds later, add the green beans, garlic, and shallot. Season the beans well with salt and pepper and cook, stirring often, until they brown and shrivel slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, carefully add the water (it will steam), and a few seconds later add the vinegar mixture. Stir the beans and cover the pan with the lid ajar. Cook until the beans are tender but still have a slight crunch, about 4 minutes. (If the water evaporates before the beans are done, add more, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Stir in the remaining 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar. Add the butter and almonds and swirl the pan just until the butter is melted. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve immediately.





“Sear-and-steam” carrots, snap peas, and more

This sear-and-steam technique works well with most firm, sturdy vegetables, as long as you adjust the cooking times for each. Sugar snap and snow peas pair nicely with Asian flavors. Sauté them with garlic and ginger, steam for a couple of minutes, and then drizzle with soy sauce and sesame oil. Although you have to be careful not to overcook zucchini and summer squash, they make a great southwestern sear-and-steam dish, seared with fresh corn kernels and finely diced peppers, steamed for just a minute, and then sprinkled with chili powder. Try sear-and-steam cauliflower with curry powder and butter or carrots with brown sugar and shallots.



Brussels Sprouts with Bacon & Thyme

Serves four as a side dish.

- 1½ tablespoons olive oil; more if needed**
- 2 thick slices bacon (about 3 ounces), cut into thin strips**
- 1 large shallot, cut into ¼-inch disks**
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed**
- 1 pound Brussels sprouts (about 25), tough outer leaves discarded; sprouts quartered through the stem (or halved if small)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup water; more if needed**
- ½ teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, coarsely chopped**
- 1 tablespoon real maple syrup**
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces**

Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat a 12-inch skillet or large wok over medium heat, put in the olive oil and bacon, and cook until the bacon is slightly browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a plate lined with paper towels. Increase the heat to high and heat the pan for 20 seconds. If the bacon hasn't rendered much fat, add another 1 tablespoon oil and then add the shallot, garlic, and Brussels sprouts. Season well with salt and pepper and cook, stirring often, until the sprouts begin to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, carefully add the water (it will steam) and thyme, and cover the pan with the lid ajar. Cook until the sprouts are tender, about 5 minutes. (If the water evaporates before the sprouts are done, add more, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Add the maple syrup, lemon juice, and reserved bacon. Swirl in the butter, season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve immediately.

Tony Rosenfeld is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

One technique lets
you make dozens of
satisfying side dishes

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

How to

At 6:30 on any given weeknight, I still don't know what to make for dinner, but chances are good that a rice pilaf will be on the menu. It's one of my favorites for dinner because most of the work gets done up front, freeing me to make the other dishes while it cooks. And if my timing on the other dishes is a bit off, the pilaf doesn't mind waiting for me to catch up.

A pilaf is more than just cooked rice. What makes a pilaf different is that the rice is first toasted in fat and then cooked in a measured amount of liquid (usually broth) that's completely absorbed by the rice. Toasting the rice in the fat first gives it a slightly nutty flavor and causes the starch on the outside of each grain to gelatinize right away, so rice pilaf tends to have a firmer texture than boiled rice, and the individual grains stay separate.

Once the liquid is added, I use a three-stage cooking method to get the best texture. In the first stage, which I call the "boil-down" stage, the liquid boils rapidly, uncovered, until it comes down to a level just above the rice. This stage continues to quickly cook the outer starch in the rice and concentrates the cooking liquid, so the pilaf is more intensely flavored. But watch carefully: if too much liquid boils off, there won't be enough to finish cooking the pilaf. As soon as the liquid is just above the rice and you see air holes forming in the rice, cover the pot and reduce the heat.

The second stage is a timed, covered, gentle simmer, during which the rice absorbs the remaining liquid and finishes cooking—and you're free to do other things. This stage can happen either on the stove or in the oven, which is convenient if your other dishes are hogging one or the other. The third stage, a five-minute covered rest off the heat, lets the rice's starch firm a bit so the grains separate easily when you fluff the pilaf. Once the five minutes are up, the rice is ready to go, but if you're not ready for it, the pilaf will hold well for about another 15 minutes as long as you don't take the lid off for very long.



Make a Rice Pilaf



Pilaf formula

Serves four.

2 tablespoons oil,
butter, or other fat

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup finely
chopped onion
or shallots

1 cup long-grain
white rice

2 cups broth or
other liquid

$\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon
kosher salt

Additional
flavorings as
desired

*Studded with almonds
and currants, Curried
Coconut Rice Pilaf adds
a crunchy-spicy
contrast to roast
chicken and peas.*

Tips for varying flavor in pilafs

- ❖ Use different types of flavorful fats. Choose from butter, olive oil, bacon fat, or poultry fat.
- ❖ Along with the onion or shallot, sweat other finely chopped or minced aromatic vegetables.
- ❖ Add dry spices at the same time as you toast the rice so the fat and the rice pick up their flavor.
- ❖ Try flavorful liquids other than broth to cook the rice. If the liquid is very strongly flavored or thick, dilute it with broth or water.
- ❖ Add fresh or dried hardy herbs (such as thyme, bay, or oregano) with the cooking liquid; add chopped fresh delicate herbs (like parsley, cilantro, dill, or tarragon) at the end of cooking.
- ❖ Add dried fruits along with the cooking liquid so they get a chance to plump up. Increase the liquid amount slightly to compensate for the amount the fruit absorbs.
- ❖ Stir chopped fresh herbs, grated citrus zest, toasted nuts or coconut, or sliced scallions into the cooked pilaf.
- ❖ The amount of salt you need to add will vary based mainly on the saltiness of the cooking liquid used.

Rice pilaf, step by step

To create an infinite variety of rice pilafs, just follow these steps and get inventive with the ingredients.

Serves four.



1 SWEAT in a heavy-based 2- or 3-quart saucepan over medium-low or medium heat until softened but not browned: $\frac{1}{3}$ cup finely chopped onion or shallots (plus optional ingredients) in 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, olive oil, or other fat.

OPTIONS: 1 large clove garlic, minced; 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger; $\frac{1}{3}$ cup finely chopped bell pepper; $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce (dry weight) chopped rehydrated dried mushrooms.



2 STIR IN and cook, stirring, for 1 minute: 1 cup long-grain white rice, plus optional ingredients.

OPTIONS: $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 teaspoons ground dried spice. Use a small amount for strong spices like hot chili powder and cumin, and a larger amount for milder spices like sweet curry powder, coriander, ground fennel, and some types of sweet paprika.



3 POUR IN 2 cups chicken broth (or a combination of broth and other liquids, such as tomato juice, dried mushroom soaking liquid, "lite" coconut milk, citrus juice, or wine) plus $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt and optional ingredients.

OPTIONS: Fresh or dried hardy herbs, like thyme and bay leaf; dried fruit; canned tomatoes.



4 BOIL uncovered over high heat until the level of the liquid is just above the level of the rice and you can see air holes forming in the rice, about 5 minutes.

RICE PILAF INSPIRATION

Use these ideas as a springboard for making your own signature rice pilafs.



Curried Coconut Pilaf

Use butter, onion, curry powder, $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups "lite" coconut milk mixed with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons chicken broth, currants, toasted sliced almonds and coconut, and fresh cilantro. Complements chicken and fish.



Lemon-Dill Pilaf

Use butter, onion, ground coriander, $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups chicken broth combined with 2 tablespoons each fresh lemon juice and dry white wine, a bay leaf, chopped fresh dill, and lemon zest. Complements mild seafood.



5 COVER immediately, reduce the heat to low, and simmer (or bake in a 350°F oven) for exactly 15 minutes, without lifting the lid.



6 LET IT REST for at least 5 minutes (and up to 20 minutes) off the heat. Don't uncover until after the first 5 minutes of resting.



7 FLUFF and separate the rice grains with a fork. Don't stir vigorously or the rice may get gummy.

8 FOLD IN any optional ingredients and then taste and add salt and pepper as needed.

OPTIONS: 1 to 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs or sliced scallions; ¼ to ⅓ cup toasted nuts; 2 tablespoons toasted coconut; 1 teaspoon grated citrus zest.



Jennifer Armentrout is Fine Cooking's test kitchen manager and recipe editor. ♦

FOR ELECTRIC STOVE USERS

Electric stoves are significantly slower than gas stoves at reacting to changes in heat settings. This delay can cause the liquid to boil over when making the transition from an uncovered boil to a covered simmer in step 5. To prevent a boilover, have a second burner already set at low and simply move the pot to this burner. Or, use the same burner but watch the pot for the first 5 minutes after turning the heat to low. If it shows signs of boiling over, take the pot off the burner for a few seconds.



Creole Pilaf

Use olive oil, onion, green pepper, garlic, cumin, paprika, a 14-ounce can diced tomatoes (juice drained and mixed with broth to make 2 cups), and fresh parsley or scallions. Complements sausages and pork chops.



Mushroom Pilaf

Use butter, shallots, dried shiitake mushrooms reconstituted in chicken broth, a sprig of fresh thyme, and chopped fresh tarragon. Complements beef.

Classic Pilaf

Shown above. Use butter, onion, chicken broth, a sprig of fresh thyme, and a bay leaf. Complements complexly flavored main dishes.

triple chocolate cheesecake

An intense creamy filling and three layers of chocolate flavor will satisfy both cheesecake and chocolate fans alike

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Years ago when I made desserts for local restaurants, my best-selling items always seemed to be either cheesecakes or anything made with chocolate. So, it was only natural that when I made this dessert—which brings the two together—people went wild. One client dubbed it the “triple-chocolate threat” for its chocolate cookie crust and the cocoa and bittersweet chocolate in its rich cheese filling. Fortunately it’s easy to make, so I was able to keep up with the many requests, and, after your friends and family clamor for more, you will, too.

For the smoothest texture, don’t overwhip the batter. While the filling is easy to throw together, it’s important to avoid overwhipping it or you’ll end up with a puffed, cracked cake. I get the best results when I begin with the cream cheese at room temperature (about 70°F). I use the paddle attachment of my stand mixer to cream the cheese without aerating it. When I’m sure that the cream cheese is supersmooth and that the sugar, cocoa, and chocolate are well combined, I add the eggs one at a time and beat on low speed until they’re just blended.

Cocoa powder is the filling’s key ingredient. Unsweetened natural cocoa powder enriches and mellows the flavor of the bittersweet chocolate, and it also helps smooth out the cheesecake’s texture. Many cheesecake recipes call for all-purpose flour to stabilize the cream cheese, but cocoa powder offers a similar binding effect without the gluey mouthfeel. The instant coffee granules or espresso powder in the filling adds a final note of smoky richness that puts this cake over the top.

If you like, you can substitute chocolate graham crackers for the chocolate wafers in the crust. Pulse either one to fine crumbs in a food processor (or pulverize them in a plastic bag) before pressing them into the springform pan.

Three hits of chocolate make this cheesecake deeply delicious: wafer cookies for the crust; bittersweet chocolate and cocoa powder for the filling.

TIP

Melt chocolate in the microwave

This shortcut is a great alternative to the traditional method of melting chocolate in a double boiler. Microwaves vary greatly, so you may need to adjust the timing to suit your machine.

Put the finely chopped chocolate in a wide, shallow bowl and heat it in the microwave on high or medium high until it just starts to melt, about a minute. Give the chocolate a good stir and microwave it again until it’s almost completely melted, about another 15 to 30 seconds. Remove the bowl and continue stirring until the chocolate is completely melted.





Triple-Chocolate Cheesecake

Yields one 9-inch cake; serves sixteen.

FOR THE CRUST:

- 1½ cups very finely crushed chocolate cookie crumbs** (I use about 30 Nabisco Famous Chocolate Wafers)
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon** (optional)
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted**

FOR THE FILLING:

- ½ cup sour cream**
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract**
- 1 teaspoon instant coffee granules or espresso powder**
- 8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped**
- 3 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, at room temperature** (I use Philadelphia)
- 3 tablespoons natural, unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted if lumpy**
- ¼ teaspoon table salt**
- 1¼ cups granulated sugar**
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature**

Make the crust: Heat the oven to 400°F. In a medium bowl, stir together the cookie crumbs, sugar, and cinnamon (if using) until blended.

Drizzle with the melted butter and mix until well blended and the crumbs are evenly moist. Dump the mixture into a 9-inch springform pan and press evenly onto the bottom and about 1 inch up the sides of the pan (to press, use plastic wrap, a straight-sided, flat-based coffee mug, or a tart tamper). Bake for 10 minutes and set on a wire rack to cool. Reduce the oven temperature to 300°F.

Make the filling and bake: Mix the sour cream, vanilla, and coffee granules in a small bowl. Set aside and stir occasionally until the coffee dissolves.

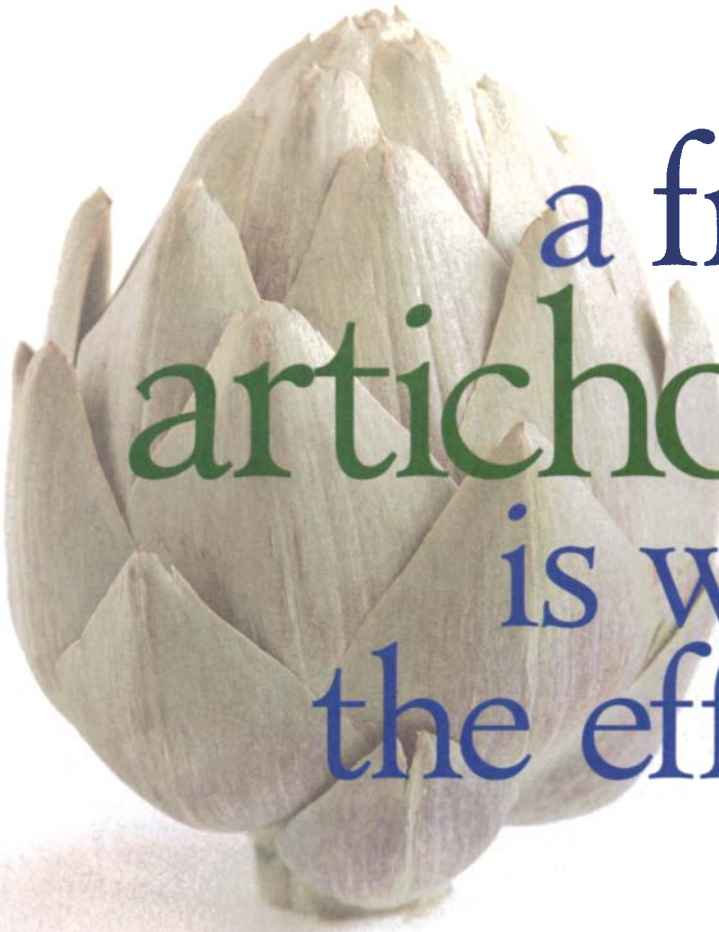
Melt the chocolate in a double boiler over medium heat (or in a microwave; see the box at left). Stir until smooth. Set aside to cool slightly.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese, cocoa powder, and salt until very smooth and fluffy, scraping down the sides of the bowl and paddle frequently (and with each subsequent addition). Add the sugar and continue beating until well blended and smooth. Scrape the cooled chocolate into the bowl; beat until blended. Beat in the sour cream mixture until

well blended. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat until just blended. (Don't overbeat the filling once the eggs have been added or the cheesecake will puff too much.) Pour the filling over the cooled crust, spread evenly, and smooth the top. Bake at 300°F until the center barely jiggles when nudged, 50 to 60 minutes. The cake will be slightly puffed, with a few little cracks around the edge. Let cool to room temperature on a rack and then refrigerate until well chilled, at least a few hours, or overnight for the best texture and flavor. (This cake freezes well, too: Put the unmolded cake in the freezer, uncovered, until the top is cold and firm, and then wrap it in two layers of plastic and one layer of foil.)

To serve: Unclasp the pan's ring, remove it, and run a long, thin metal spatula under the bottom crust. Carefully slide the cake onto a flat serving plate. Run a thin knife under hot water, wipe it dry, and cut the cake into slices, heating and wiping the knife as needed.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



a fresh artichoke is worth the effort

BY JANET FLETCHER

Raised in Texas, I never met a fresh artichoke until I moved to California for college, but I've long since made up for lost time. Artichokes are on my table at least once a week during the height of their spring season—March to May—and often during their second wave in autumn. They mingle so readily with the Mediterranean flavors and ingredients I love—garlic, prosciutto, pasta, Parmesan—that I never have to struggle for ways to use them. If you're a newcomer to artichokes, you'll need to master their prickly anatomy, but it's not difficult, and it's definitely worth the effort.

At the market, choose artichokes that feel firm and heavy for their size, a good sign that they're meaty and still full of moisture. Winter cold can cause blistery spots on an artichoke's outer leaves, but growers say the chill improves flavor and call such specimens "frost-kissed." Although I don't hesitate to buy frost-damaged artichokes, I'm not convinced that they're better.

The most prominent perennial cultivar, the Green Globe, tends to be a bit more rounded if it matures in spring and fall when days are shorter. Green Globes that mature in summer,

when days are longer, become more conical. New to markets are annual varieties that tend to be large and rounded, like a peony about to open. They're gorgeous, but not as tasty as the Globe, and unlike the Globe, they tend to get tighter as they get older. Once you get your artichokes home, store them in a loose, unsealed plastic bag in the vegetable crisper, and try to use them within a day or two. They'll hold up longer than that, but the leaves darken and the texture gets spongier with time.

Artichokes thrive in Mediterranean countries, such as Greece, Italy, Spain, and France. I take my flavor cues from these places when preparing artichokes, turning to lemon, olive oil, garlic, tarragon, mint, oregano, basil, tomato, and dill. Artichokes also love cream; try slipping some thinly sliced artichoke bottoms into a potato gratin. I often use nuts and nut oils with artichokes to echo their own nutty character.

As you'll see in the photos on pp. 57–58, you'll need to follow a couple of steps to prepare an artichoke for cooking. But with just a little practice, you'll become adept at trimming them and will be eager to enjoy them as often as I do.

They take a little preparation but the payoff is meaty sweetness—try them simply steamed, or in pasta, sautés, or salads





Fettuccine with Artichokes, Hazelnuts & Cream

Serves four as a main course; eight as an appetizer.

Try this as a main course, with a crisp salad before or after.

Kosher salt

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 small yellow onion, minced

4 large artichoke bottoms, halved, in lemon water (see Preparing Artichoke Bottoms, p. 57)

Freshly ground black pepper

1 cup homemade chicken broth (or equal parts water and low-salt canned broth)

1 cup heavy cream

½ cup coarsely chopped toasted hazelnuts

2 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley; more for garnish

1 pound dried fettuccine

Put a large pot of salted water on to boil over high heat. Heat the butter and olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over moderately low heat. Add the onion and cook until softened, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cut each artichoke half into very thin wedges (about 8 per half). Return the wedges to the lemon water. When the onion is soft, drain the artichokes and add them to the skillet. Season with salt and pepper; stir to coat. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Cook until the artichokes are tender, 20 to 30 minutes. Check occasionally to be sure they're not burning or sticking; adjust the heat accordingly and add a tablespoon or two of water if necessary to prevent burning. Add the broth, cream, hazelnuts, and 2 tablespoons parsley to the skillet and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Simmer until thickened slightly, 8 to 10 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

While the sauce is reducing, cook the pasta in the boiling water until al dente. Set aside 1 cup of the pasta water, drain the pasta, and return it to the warm pot. Add the sauce to the pasta and toss well. If the sauce is too thin, return the pot to medium heat and cook until the pasta absorbs most of it. If the pasta seems dry, moisten with some of the reserved water. Serve immediately in warm bowls, garnishing each portion with a little more parsley.



Artichoke & Butter Lettuce Salad with Tarragon Vinaigrette

Serves six as a first course.

I serve this salad as a first course, following it with fish or shellfish. In larger portions, it makes a nice lunch. An alternative cooking method for the artichokes is to steam them whole first and then remove the choke and leaves.

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

1½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 large shallot, minced (to yield 3 tablespoons)
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
4½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1½ teaspoons minced fresh tarragon
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD:

Juice of 1 large lemon
4 large whole artichoke bottoms (see Preparing Artichoke Bottoms, at right)
2 heads butter lettuce, such as Bibb or Boston (about 6 ounces each), tough outer leaves removed, pale inner leaves washed and dried
3 hard-cooked eggs, quartered

Make the vinaigrette: In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, shallot, and mustard and then gradually whisk in the olive oil to create an emulsion. Add the tarragon; season to taste with salt and pepper. Refrigerate until serving time.

Make the salad: Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the lemon juice and the prepared

artichoke bottoms. To keep the artichokes from bobbing to the top, weight them with a pot lid that's smaller than the boiling pot. Keep the pot uncovered and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cook until the artichokes are tender when pierced with a knife, about 20 minutes. Drain upside down on paper towels until cool.

Tear the lettuce into bite-size pieces. Halve each artichoke bottom and cut each half into 5 or 6 wedges. Put the artichoke wedges in a salad bowl and add 2 tablespoons of the vinaigrette; toss to coat. Add the lettuce and the remaining dressing and toss gently. Arrange the salad on six plates and garnish with the egg wedges. Serve immediately.



wine choices

Artichokes can wreak havoc with wine—but there's hope

Artichokes are hard on wine because they contain cynarin, a compound that has the peculiar property of making dry wine (and even ale and water) taste sweet.

I've found that with a plain, steamed artichoke, the sad truth is that no wine works. But when you add other ingredients, such as pasta, cream, nuts, prosciutto, or Parmesan, an artichoke dish becomes more wine-friendly. For most artichoke preparations, look to white wine, choosing a crisp style for leaner dishes, and a fuller-bodied wine for richer dishes. Some suggestions for the recipes on these pages:

- ❖ **Fettuccine with Artichokes, Hazelnuts & Cream:** Sauvignon Blanc; unoaked Chardonnay.
- ❖ **Artichokes with Peas & Prosciutto:** New Zealand or Australian Sauvignon Blanc; Pinot Grigio.
- ❖ **Artichoke & Butter Lettuce Salad with Tarragon Vinaigrette:** Dry rosé or brut sparkling wine.
- ❖ **Artichoke Risotto with Lemon & Parsley:** Pinot Grigio; Pinot Bianco.

—J. F.

preparing artichoke bottoms

Fill a large bowl with cold water and add the juice of one lemon. Pull back the outer leaves of each artichoke until they break at the base.



Remove the leaves until you reach the pale yellow-green, tender inner leaves. With a sharp knife, slice off all but 1 inch of the stem.



Cut across the leaves just above where they join the base. Discard these, but reserve the outer leaves for steaming another time, if you like.



With a small knife, pare the stem and the base, removing any dark green parts. If you like, cut the stem and base in half.



With a melon baller or a spoon, scoop out and discard the hairy choke and prickly leaves inside. Immediately drop the trimmed artichoke into the lemon water to retard browning.



Artichoke Risotto with Lemon & Parsley

Serves six as an appetizer or a side dish.

I give the artichokes a head start here, braising them until tender before the rice is added. By the time the rice is cooked, the artichokes have all but melted.

- 4 large artichoke bottoms, halved, in lemon water (see the photos at left)**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1½ cups thinly sliced leeks (white and pale green parts only), rinsed well and drained**
- 1 large clove garlic, minced**
- Sea salt or kosher salt**
- 5 to 6 cups homemade chicken broth (or equal parts low-salt canned broth and water); more as needed**
- 1½ cups arborio rice**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

Thinly slice each artichoke half. Return the slices to the lemon water. Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a heavy, wide-based pot (like a Dutch oven) over medium-low heat. Add the leeks and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the leeks are soft, about 10 minutes. Drain the artichokes and add them to the pot; season with salt

and stir to coat. Cover and cook until the artichokes are tender, about 15 minutes, checking to be sure they're not burning (a little browning is good).

Meanwhile, put the broth in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer. Adjust the heat to keep the broth at a bare simmer.

Add the rice to the artichokes and cook, stirring for 2 minutes. Add enough broth to cover the rice and simmer gently, stirring often and adding more broth, ½ to ¾ cup at a time, when the previous addition has been absorbed. (You may not need to use all the broth, or you may need a little more.) After 18 to 20 minutes, when the rice is just al dente, cover the pot and remove it from the heat. Let stand 3 minutes, uncover, and stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, the parsley, lemon zest, and several grinds of pepper. Taste and adjust the seasonings, adding more broth to loosen the risotto if you like. Divide among warm bowls and serve immediately.



Artichokes with Peas & Prosciutto

Serves four to six as a side dish.

Because fresh, tender peas don't arrive in my local markets until the spring artichoke harvest is winding down, I usually make this dish with frozen peas. If you use fresh peas, they'll need more cooking time and more water than called for below. Add fresh peas to the skillet about 10 minutes after you start the artichokes, along with just enough water to keep them steaming steadily. This dish would be delicious alongside seared lamb chops or leg of lamb.

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 small red onion, minced

4 large artichoke bottoms, halved, in lemon water (see Preparing Artichoke Bottoms, p. 57)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

10 ounces frozen peas, partially thawed

1½ ounces very thinly sliced prosciutto di Parma (about 2 slices), cut into thin strips

2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh mint

Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over moderately low heat. Add the onion and cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cut each artichoke half into thin wedges (about 6 per half). Return the wedges to the lemon water. When the onion is soft, drain the artichokes and add them to the skillet. Season with salt and pepper and stir to coat them with the fat. Cover and cook until the artichokes are almost tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Check and stir occasionally to be sure they aren't burning or sticking but are steaming steadily; adjust the heat accordingly. If there's any sticking, add a tablespoon or two of water. Add the peas and cover the pot. Cook until the peas are tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat; stir in the prosciutto and mint. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve immediately.

trimming for steaming

Slice off the stem. Rub the exposed base with lemon.



With a serrated knife, cut across the artichoke, removing about a third of the top.



With scissors, cut off the pointed tip of each outer leaf.

test kitchen tip:

In a pinch, try canned artichokes

While the flavor of a fresh artichoke is incomparable, trimming them does take a little time. So we put canned and frozen artichokes through their paces to see which fared better as a substitute in some of the recipes here.

We found that despite the noticeable tang of citric acid (added as a preservative), canned artichokes were more pleasant tasting. You can find them in jars, too, but be sure they're packed in water and citric acid, rather than in an oil marinade. Frozen artichokes turned out to be bland compared to canned, with a fibrous texture due to untrimmed outer leaves on many pieces. Cooking them in the pasta, risotto, and sauté didn't improve them.

For the salad, stick to fresh artichokes.

—the editors



Steamed Artichokes with Dipping Butters

Yields 4 artichokes.

Mixed pickling spice is sold in supermarkets. Usually it includes mustard seed, clove, bay leaf, red chile flakes, cinnamon, coriander, allspice, cardamom, and black pepper. I cut the stems off the artichokes so they sit prettily on a plate.

2 teaspoons mixed pickling spice
4 large fresh whole artichokes
½ lemon

Put 1 inch of water and the pickling spice in a pot wide enough to hold all the artichokes. Set a steamer rack in the pot; it should rest just above the water, not touching it. Bring the water to a simmer over moderate heat.

Meanwhile, trim the artichokes. Slice off the stems (save them for steaming if you like) and rub the exposed base with the lemon half. With a serrated knife, cut across each artichoke

top, removing the top third. With scissors, cut off the pointed tip of each leaf.

Rub the cut surfaces with lemon. Arrange the artichokes, stem end up, in the steamer. Cover the pot and adjust the heat so the water is at a simmer and the artichokes steam steadily.

Cook until a knife pierces the bottoms easily and an outside leaf pulls out easily, 30 to 45 minutes, depending on size. (Check occasionally to be sure the water hasn't boiled away.) Drain, stem end up, on several layers of paper towel. Serve warm or at room temperature, with your choice of dipping butter (see below) on the side. Pull off the outer leaves, dip them in butter, run your teeth across the tender bottom bit, and discard the leaf. When you get to the hairy choke, scoop it out and discard it. Cut up the bottom and dunk each piece in the dipping butter.

4 flavored butters for dipping

Each recipe yields ¾ cup, enough for 4 artichokes.

Brown Butter

¾ cup unsalted butter
¼ teaspoon kosher salt;
more to taste

Put the butter and salt in a small saucepan and melt over medium-low heat. Continue to heat the butter, keeping an eye on it, until the milk solids in the bottom of the pan are medium brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Immediately take the pan off the heat and pour into another vessel to stop the cooking. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Melted Garlic Butter

¾ cup unsalted butter
1 large clove garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon kosher salt;
more to taste

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Add the garlic and the salt; warm gently for a minute or two to release the garlic flavor. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Melted Tarragon Butter

¾ cup unsalted butter
1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
¼ teaspoon kosher salt;
more to taste

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Add the tarragon and salt; keep the pan on the heat for a minute or two to release the tarragon fragrance. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Melted Lemon Butter

¾ cup unsalted butter
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice;
more to taste
¼ teaspoon kosher salt;
more to taste

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Remove from the heat, add the lemon juice and salt. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Janet Fletcher cooks artichokes and lots of other seasonal vegetables in Napa, California. ♦



grilled cheese

To make this classic sandwich truly great, slice the bread thinly and choose excellent cheese

BY LAURA WERLIN

sandwich is obviously the cheese. Pick a good-quality cheese, and if you want that oozy, creamy cheese center, be sure it's a good melter (see the box on the opposite page). Figure one to two ounces of cheese per sandwich. Instead of cutting slices, I like to coarsely grate the cheese using the largest holes on a box grater—grated cheese melts faster and more evenly. (Cheeses like Brie and fresh goat cheese can't be grated, of course, so just remove any rind, which won't melt, and slice or spread the cheese.)

I'll say right now that I judge any grilled cheese sandwich first and foremost on how crispy-crunchy the bread is, which usually correlates directly to how thinly the bread is sliced. I find that 1/4-inch slices give good, crisp results. Thickly sliced, chewy-textured bread competes with the melty cheese, which is the star of this show. Regular sliced white bread will do the job, but I prefer something with more flavor and substance, such as Italian country bread, sourdough, egg bread, or rye.

What's the best choice for the cooking fat? Grilled cheese demands butter, which supplies flavor, richness, and that classic toasty golden color to the bread. It works best to spread softened butter right on the bread rather than to melt it in the pan. This way, you'll use exactly the amount of butter the bread needs, and the sandwich won't get greasy. If the butter is cold, it won't spread easily and will rip into your bread, so pop a stick in the microwave for five seconds to soften it.

Some people put macaroni and cheese at the top of their "comfort food" list, but for me, nothing beats a grilled cheese sandwich. The melting, oozy cheese between slices of crisp, buttery bread is utterly seductive and totally satisfying. Best of all, making a really great grilled cheese sandwich takes almost no effort yet can be as gratifying as a dish that takes all day to cook. While researching a book on American cheesemakers, I grabbed every opportunity to hone my technique, and along the way, I invented several variations to keep things interesting.

The big three: great-tasting cheese, thinly sliced bread, and butter. The most important ingredient in this

Classic Grilled Cheese

Serves four.

Don't be timid when pressing the sandwiches after you've turned them. A little muscle power ensures terrific, crisp results.

4 teaspoons salted butter, at room temperature
8 slices (¼ inch thick) Italian country bread or sourdough
6 ounces coarsely grated Cheddar

Butter all the bread slices on one side only. Put four slices of bread, buttered side down, on a cutting board. Distribute the cheese over the bread slices. Top with the remaining bread, buttered side up.

To cook the sandwiches: Heat a large nonstick pan or griddle over medium-high heat for 2 minutes. Put as many sandwiches as will fit in the pan or on the griddle without crowding, cover, and cook until the cheese has just begun to melt and the bread is golden brown, about 2 minutes. Remove the lid and turn the sandwiches, pressing each one firmly with a spatula to flatten it slightly. Cook the sandwiches uncovered until the bottom is golden brown, about 1 minute. Turn them once more and press with the spatula again to re crisp the bread, about 30 seconds. Cut the sandwiches in half and serve immediately.



Butter the bread, not the pan.



Press each sandwich firmly.



Flip twice for crispness.



Grilled Brie with Apricot Jam

Serves four for lunch; six to eight as an hors d'oeuvre.

These make delicious and popular appetizers. Cut the sandwiches in halves or quarters, arrange on a platter, and serve.

4 teaspoons salted butter, at room temperature
8 slices French bread, cut on an angle ¼ inch thick
3 tablespoons apricot jam
5 ounces ripe Brie or Camembert, rind removed; cheese sliced while cold (leave the slices at room temperature for easier spreading)

Butter all the bread slices on one side only. Put them all, buttered side down, on a cutting board. Spread four of the slices with a thin layer of jam (about 2 teaspoons per slice). Spread the cheese on the other four slices. Pair the jam slices with the cheese slices. Cook as directed in the Classic Grilled Cheese recipe at left.

Good melting cheeses

Brie
 Camembert
 Cheddar
 Emmental
 Fontina
 Gruyère
 Havarti
 Monterey Jack
 Mozzarella
 Swiss

Secondary cheeses for added flavor

Dry Jack
 Parmigiano Reggiano
 Pecorino

Keys to a great grilled cheese sandwich

❖ Use a nonstick skillet or griddle. This prevents sticking, even when some of the cheese oozes out of the sides. In a skillet, you'll need to cook the sandwiches in batches.

❖ Heat the pan well and have a lid handy. The hot, dry pan helps crisp the buttered bread. I keep the lid on only long enough to let the cheese begin to melt. Then I flip the sandwich and let it finish cooking uncovered so it crisps rather than steams.

❖ Press the sandwiches firmly with a spatula after flipping. The bread needs maximum contact with the pan for the most crispness. Just before they're done, I flip them once more and press again—a minor step, but it ensures that crisp crunch.



French-Style Grilled Ham & Gruyère

Serves four.

This is my take on the croque monsieur. I dropped the white sauce and added tarragon and Dijon mustard instead.

- 6 ounces coarsely grated Gruyère**
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon or 1 teaspoon dried tarragon**
- 4 teaspoons salted butter, at room temperature**
- 8 slices (¼ inch thick) egg bread, such as challah or brioche**
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard; more for serving**
- 4 thin slices (about ¼ pound total) Black Forest ham**

In a small bowl, mix together the cheese and tarragon. Butter all the bread slices on one side only. Put four slices, buttered side down, on a cutting board. Distribute the cheese over the bread and top with the ham, folding the slices if they're large. Spread about 1½ teaspoons mustard on the unbuttered side of the remaining bread slices and set them, mustard side down, on top. Cook as directed in the Classic Grilled Cheese recipe on p. 61. Serve with more mustard on the side.

Laura Werlin is the author of The New American Cheese. Her new book, The All-American Cheese & Wine Book, is due out this spring. ♦



Grilled Mozzarella & Pecorino with Tomato & Basil

Serves four.

Vacuum-packed mozzarella tends to be dry and easy to grate. If it's in whey or water, you'll need to pat the cheese dry and then chop it.

- 4 teaspoons salted butter, at room temperature**
- 8 slices (¼ inch thick) Italian country bread**
- 6 ounces mozzarella, coarsely grated or chopped (to yield about 2 cups)**
- 2 ounces finely grated aged Pecorino or Parmigiano Reggiano (to yield about ½ cup)**
- 8 large fresh basil leaves, torn or sliced**
- 1 to 2 medium plum tomatoes (about ½ pound total), sliced ⅛ inch thick**
- Kosher salt to taste**
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest**

Butter all the bread slices on one side only. Put four slices, buttered side down, on a cutting board. Distribute the mozzarella over the bread and follow with the Pecorino or Parmigiano (about 2 tablespoons per sandwich). Top with the basil, the tomato slices, a sprinkling of salt, and the lemon zest. Put the remaining bread, buttered side up, on top. Cook as directed in the Classic Grilled Cheese recipe on p. 61.



Grilled Goat Cheese with Tapenade

Serves four.

Many grocery stores now carry prepared tapenade; to make your own, finely chop or process a handful of pitted kalamata olives with capers, anchovies, and garlic and then mix with a little olive oil and lemon juice to taste.

- 4 teaspoons salted butter, at room temperature**
- 8 slices (¼ inch thick) Italian country bread or sourdough**
- 4 tablespoons olive tapenade**
- ¼-pound log fresh goat cheese, cut into twelve ¼-inch rounds**

Butter all the bread slices on one side only. Put four slices, buttered side down, on a cutting board. Spread 1 tablespoon of tapenade on each slice and top with 3 cheese rounds. Top with the remaining bread, buttered side up. Cook as directed in the Classic Grilled Cheese recipe on p. 61.

As you can probably tell by the name of my restaurant, Mother's Bistro & Bar, home cooking is my thing. But sometimes I like to tweak a "mother" recipe by taking the basic idea, updating the ingredients, fine-tuning the recipe, and intensifying the flavors. My beef Stroganoff is a good example. Although the name sounds fancy, it's a one-pan dish that takes well to a little variation.

Beef tenderloin is traditional and works great for beef Stroganoff—I especially like it because it's so tender and cooks quickly. But tenderloin isn't necessarily the most flavorful cut. So, I bump up the flavor in a couple of other ways. I use earthy, intense porcini mushrooms to infuse the beef broth and to add texture to the finished Stroganoff. I use cremini mushrooms instead of regular button mushrooms in the sauté, because cremini contain less water and take much better to browning. Instead of finishing the sauce with the traditional sour cream, I prefer crème fraîche, which I find to be lighter, with a tangy, nuanced nuttiness. (For more on crème fraîche, see p. 74.)

Once you've tried my version, have a go at tweaking it yourself. Oregon, where I live, is a mecca for wild mushrooms, so when I can get my hands on fresh chanterelles, oyster mushrooms, lobster mushrooms, or morels, I substitute those for the cremini. Other variations can be less exotic: Instead of beef tenderloin, try other quick-cooking meat cuts, such as chicken breast or pork loin. For a Hungarian version, add some paprika in addition to the salt and pepper, try dill instead of parsley, substitute tomato paste for Dijon mustard, and use the traditional sour cream.

Beef Stroganoff with a Fresh Twist

This updated version gets added flavor from porcini and cremini mushrooms and a lighter feel from crème fraîche

BY LISA SCHROEDER



Beef Stroganoff with Cremini & Porcini Mushrooms

Serves four.

If you want to double the recipe, use two skillets rather than trying to crowd the pan.

1½ cups beef broth (low-salt, if canned) or veal stock
½ ounce dried porcini mushrooms (about ½ cup)
3 tablespoons vegetable oil (not olive oil)
¼ cup unsalted butter
8 to 10 ounces fresh cremini mushrooms, stems trimmed, caps wiped clean and thickly sliced
1 pound beef tenderloin, cut into strips about 2 inches long and ½ inch wide
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 medium onion, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
5 tablespoons crème fraîche

FOR SERVING:

Cooked egg noodles or fresh egg fettuccine
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

In a small saucepan, combine the broth and dried porcini. Bring to a boil, remove from the heat, cover, and let steep for 30 minutes. With a slotted spoon, lift the porcini out of the broth; chop coarsely and set aside. Strain the broth through a cheesecloth-lined sieve and set aside.

Heat 1 tablespoon each of the oil and butter in a large sauté pan or skillet (a 12-inch skillet is perfect) over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the cremini mushrooms and sauté, stirring often with a wooden spoon, until the mush-

rooms are softened and well browned, 5 to 6 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and transfer the cremini to a bowl.

Season the beef strips generously with salt and pepper and dredge it in the flour. Return the pan to medium-high heat and add the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil. When the oil is very hot, swirl to coat the pan and then add the beef, spreading it in a single layer and stirring with the wooden spoon so that it browns quickly on all sides, 1 to 2 minutes. Be sure not to overcrowd the pan; work in batches if necessary. Sauté the beef just long enough so that it browns slightly on all sides; don't overcook it. Transfer the beef to the bowl with the cremini.

Still over medium-high heat, melt the remaining 3 tablespoons butter in the pan and add the onion. Sauté, scraping up the browned bits in the bottom of the pan with the wooden spoon, until the onion just begins to brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Pour in the reserved porcini soaking broth. Stir in the mustard and Worcestershire sauce and then add the porcini, cremini, and beef, along with any accumulated juices. Bring to a simmer while stirring. Cook just long enough so that the sauce thickens slightly, 1 to 2 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and stir in the crème fraîche, cooking just until heated through. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve over the egg noodles or fettuccine, sprinkled with the parsley.



Dredge the beef in flour to help it brown quickly in the pan.



Strain the porcini-enriched beef broth to remove grit from the mushrooms. The porcini and their soaking liquid give the Stroganoff great depth of flavor.



Brown the meat quickly in a single layer. Don't crowd the pan; work in batches if you don't have a 12-inch skillet.



Stir in the crème fraîche and cook just until heated through.

Build a menu around beef Stroganoff

Although beef Stroganoff is a one-pan dish and not ultra fancy, it does feel a little special. So if you build a menu around it, bookend it with a light starter and a light dessert.

Starters

Begin with a salad. I like:

- ❖ Bistro Salad with Warm Goat Cheese, p. 21.
- ❖ Roasted beets, blue cheese, toasted walnuts, and mesclun with a balsamic vinaigrette.
- ❖ Grilled asparagus with a citrus vinaigrette, sprinkled with chives.
- ❖ Artichoke & Butter Lettuce Salad, p. 56.

Side dishes

Beef Stroganoff is delicious with the egg noodles I suggest here, but other starches make good side dishes, provided they can soak up the wonderful sauce. Try spaetzle (tiny dumplings), mashed potatoes, steamed new potatoes, or a simple rice pilaf (see p. 48).

Dessert

End with something fruity. Try:

- ❖ Pears poached in spiced red wine.
- ❖ An apple or pear tart or galette.
- ❖ Crisp tuile cups (see p. 66) filled with passionfruit sorbet or another bright, intensely flavored sorbet.

Wine

Select a full-bodied red wine to go along with the Stroganoff, such as a Rioja, a Côtes du Rhône, a Grenache, or a Grenache-Syrah blend from Australia. All of these will complement and stand up nicely to the rich, intense flavors of the porcini, onion, and beef.

Lisa Schroeder is the chef and owner of Mother's Bistro & Bar in Portland, Oregon. ♦

A Crisp Cookie

That Shapes Up Beautifully

Bend classic French *tuiles* into elegant desserts—or just serve them as irresistibly crunchy cookies

BY JOANNE CHANG



Every pastry chef has a baking version of a party trick, something that's sure to elicit *oohs* and *aahs* but that isn't nearly as difficult to make as it looks. Mine is the tuile cookie. Tuile (pronounced TWEEL) means "tile" in French; traditionally, these crisp, wafer-thin cookies are shaped (after they're baked and while they're still warm and flexible) to resemble the curved roof tiles found on country houses in France.

Once I learned about the classic roof-tile shape, I picked up other ways to bend the cookies and was soon hooked on their versatility. I fashioned small cookie cones and filled them with berries and lemon curd. I layered flat tuile cookies with seasonal fruit

and whipped cream or sabayon to create napoleons. I draped the warm cookies over inverted shot glasses, and when they cooled, they became crisp, fluted cups for sorbet.

Whatever their shape, tuiles are delicious cookies in their own right, the perfect accompaniment to coffee and tea. And they can serve as showstopping dessert garnishes. For example, you can cut the warm cookies into triangles or strips, drape them over a can or another object, and they'll conform to that shape. Next to a wedge of cake or pie, these abstract forms add dramatic impact.

If you're thinking that this sounds like the kind of extra touch only a pastry chef could manage, think again. Making the batter for

tuiles couldn't be any easier. All you do is whisk together sugar, egg whites, melted butter, flour, and perhaps a spice or extract for flavor, and let the batter chill for a few hours.

The real skill and creativity with tuiles comes with the baking and shaping, but even a beginner will get the hang of it after a few practice tries. Begin by reading the guidelines on p. 69 and then get ready to start improvising.

Tuiles are best eaten the day they're made. They'll last for several days in an airtight container, but as they get older, they tend to get soft. But the batter holds for two weeks, so you can bake just enough for the day and save the leftover batter for later.

Ideas for using tuiles

Tip: Tuiles soften when they're paired with anything moist (like ice cream or lemon curd), so assemble these types of dessert just before serving.

Make a fruit napoleon: Spoon or pipe pastry cream lightened with whipped cream between flat tuiles and top with fruit (see the photo at left).

Fill a tuile cone with lemon curd and berries.

Make a hot fudge sundae in a large tuile bowl.

Garnish a custard or a slice of pie or cake with a tuile corkscrew.

Fill a small tuile cup with whipped cream and fresh fruit.

Serve flat tuile cookies with tea or as a light ending to lunch.

Make a mini tart shell by bending the tuile over the bottom of a soda can. Fill with chocolate pudding or ganache and whipped cream. Top with chocolate shavings.

Classic tuile: Lay the hot cookie on a rolling pin as it cools to get the traditional roof tile form. You can also use a juice bottle or a small can as a mold.

Tuile cup or bowl: To make a cup, drape the hot cookie over an inverted shot glass, molding it as it cools. To make a bowl, start out with a bigger circle of batter and mold the baked cookie over a glass or cup with a larger base.

Tuile Cookie Batter

Yields about thirty 4- to 4½-inch rounds.

This versatile cookie batter is easy to make and holds for up to two weeks in the refrigerator. For a nutty variation, you can sprinkle lightly toasted sliced or chopped almonds on top of the unbaked cookies.

¾ cup granulated sugar
3 large egg whites
¼ pound (½ cup) butter, melted
and cooled to room temperature
2¼ ounces (½ cup) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
(or 1 teaspoon ground ginger,
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon, or ½ teaspoon pure almond extract)

In a medium bowl, whisk together the sugar and egg whites until well combined—you're not beating in air and the whites shouldn't be foamy. Add the melted butter and whisk until combined. Add the flour and vanilla (or another extract or spice, if using), and whisk to combine; the mixture should be smooth. Refrigerate the batter for at least 4 hours and up to two weeks.

To bake and shape the cookies, follow the photos and instructions on pp. 68-69.



Helpful equipment for baking tuiles

You can successfully bake tuiles on any baking sheet lined with parchment and sprayed liberally with nonstick spray, but it can be tricky: parchment tends to wrinkle as you spread the batter and some thin baking sheets buckle in the oven's heat. For the best results, you might want to try the following items:

A nonstick baking mat, such as Cook-Eze or Silpat. These mats prevent the batter from spreading randomly while baking and make it easy to slide the cookie off the sheet for handling. For sources, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 80.

A perfectly flat, rigid, heavy-duty baking sheet. I use a regular sheet pan, but I'm sure an insulated or nonstick baking sheet would work well, just because they're usually so straight. If your pan is warped or uneven, the batter, which liquifies immediately in the oven, will slide around and spread unevenly.



Tuile cone: Roll up a free-form cone or else use a mold (see p. 80). To make your own mold, crumple foil and shape it into a cone. Set the cone on the hot cookie with the cone's tip on the edge of the circle. Wrap both sides around the cone so the two edges meet. Hold them together for a few seconds to fuse them as the cookie cools. Remove the foil cone and use it again.

Corkscrew garnish: Spread the batter into a rectangle and, after baking, cut it into strips with a pizza cutter. Wrap the strips around the handle of a wooden spoon.

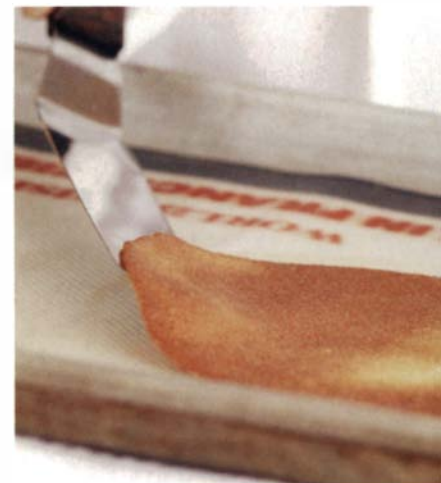
To bake and shape the cookies

Start off by baking only one or two cookies at a time until you get a feel for the timing—they firm up quickly. For more tips, see "Guidelines" at right.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line a very flat, level baking sheet or cookie sheet with a nonstick baking mat (or with parchment sprayed liberally with nonstick cooking spray).



Spoon a small amount of tuile batter (p. 67) on the baking sheet. Spread as evenly and thinly as possible into a circle the size you want (the size won't change much during baking).



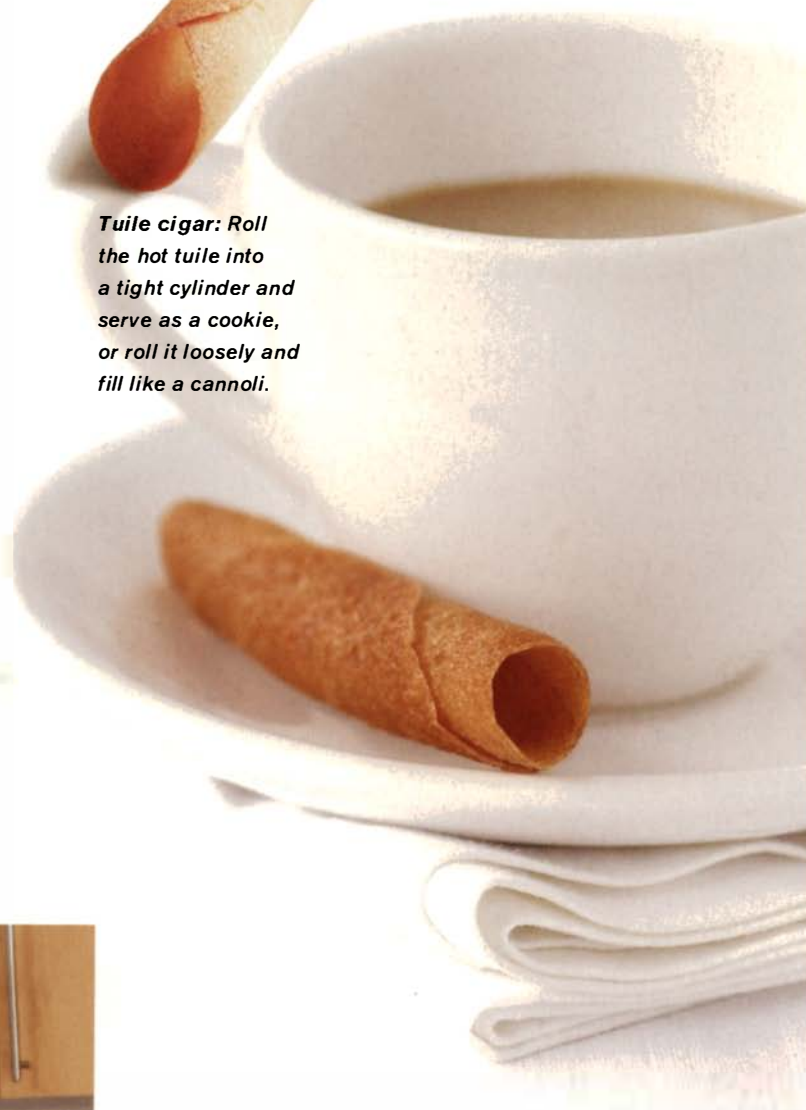
Bake until the cookie is golden brown all over, 9 to 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and immediately start to maneuver a spatula under the edge of the cookie. After 10 seconds or so, it will hold together and can be slid off the sheet with the spatula.



Abstract form: Cut the hot cookie in half and lay the halves over an object or twist them into any shape you like.



Tuile cigar: Roll the hot tuile into a tight cylinder and serve as a cookie, or roll it loosely and fill like a cannoli.



Leave the tuile flat or mold it into one of the shapes shown in the photos starting on p. 67. You'll have 15 to 20 seconds to manipulate the cookie.



Any heatproof object can serve as a mold. The tuile will firm up in a minute and should release easily.



Use a new, cool baking sheet for each batch, or let the sheet cool completely (or run it under cool water and dry it well). If the batter is spooned onto a hot pan, it will melt instantly and become unspreadable.

Guidelines for shaping tuiles

A freshly baked tuile goes through several stages before it cools to its crisp final state. Immediately out of the oven, it's still too delicate and hot to handle, and if you tried to work with it, it would tear. After 10 to 15 seconds, the cookie cools enough to hold together and bend. It stays pliable for another 15 to 20 seconds—this is your window for manipulating the cookie into a different shape.

If you wait too long, the cookie starts to crisp and your shaping attempts will only result in shattered cookies. If that happens, you can put the cookie back on the pan and warm it in the oven for a few seconds until it softens. But with each reheating, the cookie cools and firms faster than before, so I recommend only two reheatings at most.

Another suggestion: You might need to wear sturdy rubber gloves when handling the hot tuiles. The point at which the cookies can be shaped seems to coincide with the point at which they're still a bit too hot to touch. (I've been baking these for so long that I have calluses on my fingers, which is why you see me shaping them bare-handed in the photo.)

Joanne Chang is the chef-owner of Flour, a bakery shop and café in Boston. ♦

One of the questions we're often asked is: How many times does *Fine Cooking* test its recipes? The answer is: As many times as it takes to get it right. We make each recipe in the test kitchen exactly as it's submitted to

catch our readers' attention. The idea of a tasting may sound fun, but sampling a stir-fry, two vinaigrettes, five granitas, and several omelets in a row takes more than an appetite, it takes dedication. We concentrate on critical

"We put a lot of effort into testing our recipes, but it's worth it."

us by the author, and then our entire staff tastes it. As many as ten people might be at a tasting, which may seem like a lot, but with our diverse tastes—one of us hates raw red peppers, another can't take too much spicy heat—we're sure to be sensitive to what might

evaluation: Does the dish taste great? Is it worth the effort? Are the directions logical? Then we retest—sometimes several times—until we're confident that our readers will have great results at home.

—Jennifer Armentrout,
test kitchen manager

what we mean by: dice



LARGE
3/4 inch



MEDIUM
1/2 inch



SMALL
1/4 inch



FINE
1/8 inch

To "dice" is to cut a vegetable or other food into cubes. Each size of dice corresponds to a particular measurement, as shown at left, but it's not absolutely necessary to whip out your ruler each time you dice something. While it's a good idea to aim for these measurements, it's more important that your batch of dice is consistently sized so the food cooks evenly.

—J. A.

favorite tool

The slotted spatula

Every cook should have one of these spatulas in his or her kitchen tool kit. You'll find dozens of uses for it, but the spatula's angled edge and slightly cradled blade make it especially good at maneuvering under and handling delicate items like fish fillets.

The slots come into action when you're poaching fish because they allow the cooking liquid to drain away when you retrieve the fish. Southpaws beware: The angle and curvature of the spatula is usually oriented for right-handers, but left-handed versions are available. For where to buy slotted spatulas for righties and lefties, see p. 80. —J. A.



tip:



Your chef's knife is also an avocado pitter

To neatly remove the pit from an avocado, slice the avocado in half lengthwise around the pit. Twist the two halves in opposing directions and pull them apart. You'll have one pit-free half. Cup the half with the pit in the palm of your hand. Carefully but firmly chop the blade of a chef's knife into the pit. Use the knife to twist the pit out of the avocado. To dislodge the pit from the knife, scrape it off against the inside edge of the sink. —J. A.

How to cut a mango

Mangos contain a large, flat seed that doesn't separate readily from the juicy flesh, so the flesh needs to be cut away from the seed. Mango flesh can be slippery, so leaving the skin on until you've dealt with the seed will help your grip.

—J. A.



Balance the mango on one of its narrow sides, and then slice off one of the wide sides of the fruit. Try to cut as close to the seed as possible, usually about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the center. Repeat with the other wide side, and then slice off the remaining narrow pieces of fruit.

To dice the mango, cup one of the unpeeled pieces in your palm and use a paring knife to score the fruit into the size of dice you want. Be careful not to cut through the skin of the fruit (or into your hand).



Use your fingertips to pop the mango inside out, and then use the paring knife to slice the dice away from the skin.

skinning a salmon fillet

Although most fish sellers will skin salmon fillets for you if you ask, it's easy to do it yourself. If you need skinless single-portion size fillets, buy one or two large pieces of salmon and skin them before slicing into portions. Figure on about 2 ounces of trim loss per pound of fish.

1 Run your fingertips up and down the center of the flesh, feeling for tiny pin bones. If you find any, use a pair of needlenose pliers or tweezers to yank them out.

2 Position a cutting board near the edge of the counter and put the fillet, skin side down, on the board, close to the counter edge. This set-up prevents knuckle-scraping. Beginning at the tail end of the fillet, work the edge of a sharp, long and narrow slicing knife between the flesh and skin. If you don't have a tail end, start at one corner of the fillet and work your way in until the knife is between the skin and flesh all the way across one short end of the fillet.

3 With your free hand and using a paper towel for better traction, grasp the just-freed end of skin and pull on it as you simultaneously run the knife down the length of the fillet (in the opposite direction that you're pulling). Keep the knife angled slightly down toward the skin, and use a very slight sawing motion if necessary. The skin should come off in one piece, but if it doesn't, flip the fillet over and trim any errant patches of skin.

—J. A.



1 Remove the pin bones.



2 Work the knife between the flesh and the skin.



3 Pull the skin and run the knife down the length of the fillet.

What size is my skillet?



Quiz time: When a recipe calls for an 8-, 10-, or 12-inch slope-sided skillet and you don't know what size your skillet is, do you measure the pan across its top or its bottom?

Answer: The cookware industry standard is to measure the skillet across its top.

—J. A.

How can you tell when fish is done?

Believe it or not, the best way to tell if fish is done perfectly is to take a peek. As fish cooks, its flesh loses its shiny, almost translucent quality and gradually becomes opaque. To take a look, poke the tip of a paring knife between two flakes. Not only will you be able to see if the flesh is opaque throughout, but you'll also be able to feel that the flesh has gone from flimsy to firm. It shouldn't, however, flake apart—that's overdone.

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Homemade Crème Fraîche

Yields 1 pint; recipe may be multiplied or divided.

This crème fraîche isn't as thick as the commercial product, but it tastes terrific. We developed this recipe using ultra-pasteurized heavy cream because it's most widely available. If you can find regular pasteurized heavy cream, use it: Your results will likely be thicker. Also, if it's a warm day, the cream may thicken in a shorter amount of time.

1 cup heavy cream
1 cup buttermilk (with active cultures)

Heat the cream to 80° to 85°F, being careful not to overheat. Transfer it to a clean container, stir in the buttermilk, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit in a warm spot at room temperature until slightly thickened, about 24 hours. Chill well before using. After chilling, the crème fraîche should be about as firm as loose yogurt. Store in the refrigerator for up to 10 days.

ingredient

Crème fraîche

Among the many culinary innovations that have come out of France, crème fraîche is perhaps one of its most beguiling. Traditionally made from unpasteurized cream that's left to ferment naturally, crème fraîche (pronounced krehm FRESH) is a slightly sour, thickened cream. It's tangy and nutty, more politely rounded than sour cream, and without so much bite. Its consistency is semi-firm yet compliant.

Use it as a garnish or as an ingredient. Cooks cherish crème fraîche for its ability to endure heat—to readily melt with a remarkable reluctance to curdle, even when boiled hard. This makes it an ideal, silky enrichment for stirring into soups or sauces.

Crème fraîche marries well with both the sweet and the savory, as well as the cool and the cooked. Dollop it on fresh fruit or just about any pastry dessert for a tangy contrast. A classic pairing is with tarte Tatin, a caramelized apple tart. Crème fraîche is refreshing on a slab of ripe tomato with salt and a little fresh pepper or with a

shaving of smoked salmon dressed with capers, red onion, and a squeeze of lemon. It's perfect with potatoes—tucked in a gratin, topped on a steaming baked potato, or tossed with steamed red-skinned potatoes, parsley, and chives. You can serve a dab of it on a little canapé, such as a rice cracker, with a slice of avocado. Whisk it into your beef Stroganoff (see p. 63) or use it to finish a braised chicken dish. Dress up a green-chile and pork burrito, or pair it with anything elegant, like caviar.

Buy it or make it. Until recently, crème fraîche was a pricey import. But in the last few years American cheesemakers have delivered their domestic versions to market, and many are quite good. But to say that it's now a cheap and widely available product would be a half truth. It's about \$4 for 8 ounces, and only some food markets carry it in their specialty cheese displays. Fortunately, it's quite simple to make from scratch (see the recipe at left).

—Maryellen Driscoll,
 editor at large

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Have utensils, will travel could be Susan Titcomb's motto. Fourteen years ago, Titcomb, a 41 year old mother of two from San Diego, California, had a passion for cooking and a desire to control her own destiny. Armed with an idea, her husband's support, very little capital and virtually no business experience, she started the country's first personal chef service. Personally Yours Personal Chef Service became an overnight success and spurred her on to become a cofounder of the United States Personal Chef Association. "A personal chef can make \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year,



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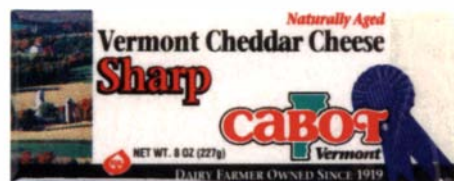
READER SERVICE NO. 77

tasting panel

Sharp Cheddar

Cheeddar is *the* all-American, all-purpose cheese. It's often savored simply as an appetizer or with a wedge of apple pie. It's a mainstay of grilled cheese sandwiches and beloved in "mac and cheese." It partners well with anything potato (try the Baked Potato Soup recipe on p. 78). So it only makes sense that when you're buying Cheddar, you want the best. Unfortunately, the ultimate in Cheddars—English-style "farmhouse" Cheddars—are expensive and hard to find. Supermarkets, however, carry a wide selection of affordable, albeit mass-market Cheddars. We decided to find out which, if any, were worthwhile. For the blind tasting, we stuck with sharp Cheddars (considering them more multi-functional in the kitchen than extra-sharp) that are offered on either a national or a large regional scale.

—M. D.



top pick

CABOT

\$2.89 for 8 ounces;
aged for at least
5 to 8 months

This Vermont-made Cheddar clearly stood out as the favorite. Its flavor was "overall pretty mellow" yet "nicely complex—sweet and nutty but with a layering of sour and a long slightly biting

finish." The texture was "tenderly toothy with a nice creamy crumble at the end." The level of sharpness was assertive enough to serve as an appetizer or dessert "but not so edgy that it would throw your omelet out of balance."

TASTING RESULTS

Cheeses numbered in order of preference.



2 HELUVA GOOD

\$2.59 for 8 ounces;
aged over 60 days

This Cheddar was well balanced in flavor, with a soft tang, a subtle herbal note, a hint of sweetness, and no off flavors. Its degree of sharpness was considered more like that of a medium-sharp Cheddar than a sharp. Texture-wise, the cheese was dense and smooth, if a tad rubbery.

3 TILLAMOOK

\$4.25 for 8 ounces;
aged over 9 months

This cheese had a "nice overall balance of acidity and nuttiness." The sharpness was described as "more of a brightness." It "gives your palate a nice lift at the finish, but it's not sharp." The texture was dense and smooth and lacked the characteristic Cheddar crumble. Its soft orange color (naturally colored with annatto) was off-putting to many tasters.

4 HORIZON

\$4.99 for 8 ounces;
aged over 60 days

Our tasters were curiously split on this cheese, either choosing it as a favorite or rejecting it firmly without hesitation. Its fans praised it for "a depth of flavor the others don't have—almost a glow to its finish." For its critics, the turnoff was a markedly sour character and burning aftertaste. All agreed on the texture—firm, soft, and crumbly all at once.

5 LAND O'LAKES

\$2.59 for 8 ounces;
age not indicated

This cheese was aptly described as "a little uninspired." There was nothing offensive about it; it offered a slight tang to start but otherwise had no body or flavor. "It doesn't say much for the cheese when a bit of cracker overpowers it," observed one taster. "This cheese wants to be sharp but can't seem to get there." The texture was moist, tender, and homogeneous.

6 CRACKER BARREL

\$3.29 for 10 ounces;
aged over 60 days

This cheese "hints of Cheddar but doesn't shout it," coming in short on flavor and depth with "no real kick or tang." The texture was very creamy in the mouth and chew, with no discernable Cheddar crumble. Tasters agreed they wanted more sharpness and more overall from this cheese than it delivered.

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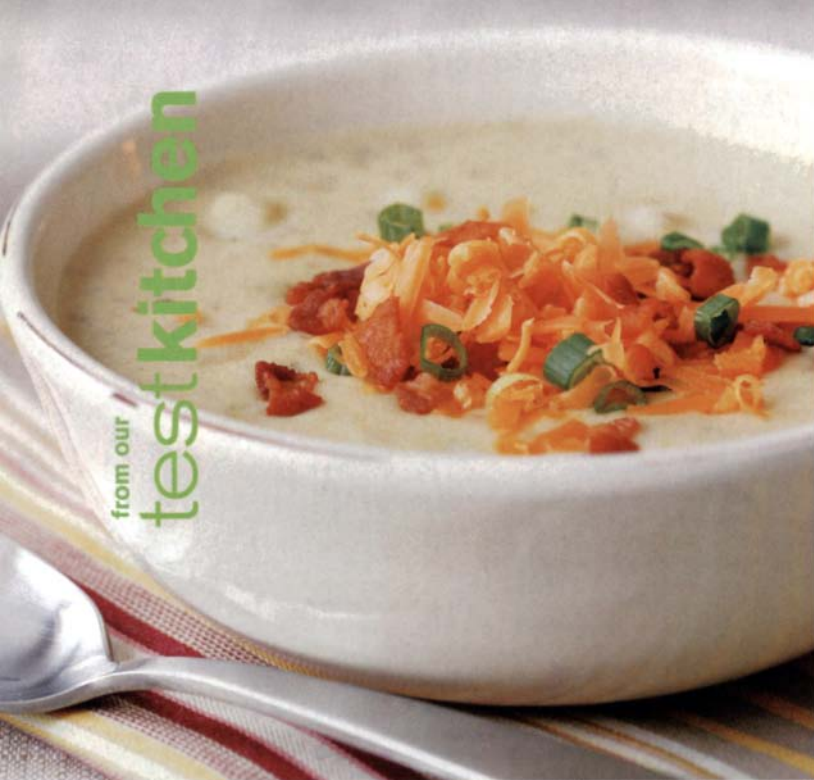
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Baked Potato & Leek Soup with Cheddar & Bacon

Yields about 6 cups; serves four.

- 2 medium russet potatoes**
(about ½ pound each)
- ¼ cup unsalted butter**
- 2½ cups sliced leeks** (about
2 medium leeks; white and
light green parts), rinsed well
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground
black pepper**
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt
canned chicken broth**
- ½ cup milk**
- ½ cup sour cream**
- 4 thick slices bacon, cut into
½-inch dice**
- 1 cup grated sharp Cheddar**
(about ¼ pound)
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced
scallion greens or chives**

Heat the oven to 375°F. Scrub the potatoes in water, pat dry, and pierce in several places with a fork. Set them directly on an oven rack and bake until very tender when pierced with a fork, about 1 hour. Let cool completely on a wire rack.

Melt the butter in a soup pot over medium-low heat. Add the leeks and garlic, season with salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the broth and 2 cups water. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook until the

leeks are very tender, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the bacon in a skillet and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until browned and crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the bacon bits with a slotted spoon to a saucer lined with paper towels to drain and cool.

When the potatoes are cool, cut one of them in half lengthwise. Use a large spoon to scoop the flesh in one piece from each half. Cut the flesh into ½-inch cubes and set aside. Coarsely chop the potato skin and the entire remaining potato and add to the pot with the leeks. Purée the contents of the pot in a blender until very smooth (you'll need to work in two batches). Return the puréed soup to a clean soup pot and reheat over medium low. Whisk together the milk and sour cream until smooth and then whisk this into the soup, along with ½ cup of the Cheddar. Stir in the diced potato. The soup should be fairly thick, but if it seems too thick, thin it with a little water. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve garnished with the remaining Cheddar, the bacon bits, and the scallions or chives.

—J. A.

Cooking with Cheddar

In addition to being a popular companion to the cracker, sharp Cheddar is ideal for cooking because it melts smoothly without losing its body. We had lots of sharp Cheddar left in the test kitchen after our blind tasting (see p. 76 for the results), so we made this soup one day for lunch to use some of it up. It was so satisfying, we thought we should share the recipe. For more of a tangy bite, you can use extra-sharp Cheddar instead of sharp, but it may not melt as smoothly because it has a lower moisture content.

when is sharp extra-sharp?

During our Cheddar tasting, we were taken aback by how much the cheeses varied in degree of sharpness, some seeming more like a mild Cheddar than a sharp. As it turns out, there are no federal standards for how to define the degree of sharpness in a Cheddar. For our favorite in the tasting, the manufacturer ages it anywhere from five to eight months (Cabot has two tasters who gauge when a batch has reached its desired sharpness). Other manufacturers can only promise that their cheese was aged for at least two months. (Some use certain enzymes that accelerate the aging process.)

Nor are there federal rules for how a Cheddar is made. Originally made in Cheddar Gorge, England, Cheddar is traditionally made by packing coagulated milk curds into slabs, and then stacking and turning them repeatedly to expel as much liquid (whey) as possible (a process known as “cheddaring”). Most mass-market American brands stir the curds, press out the whey in machine-operated vats, and age the cheese in plastic. The result is often a less complex tasting, more homogeneously textured cheese. Yet, as we found, there is at least one good, affordable option and a few others that are decent; see p. 76.

—M. D.

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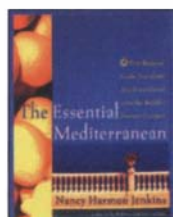
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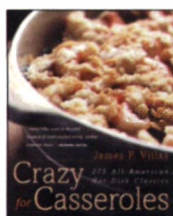
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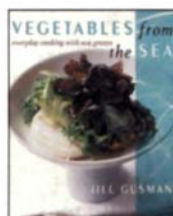
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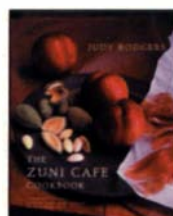
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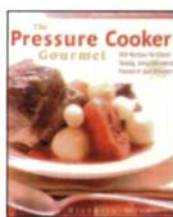
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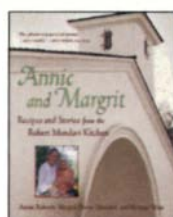
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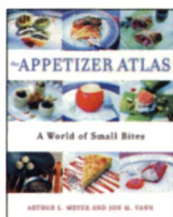
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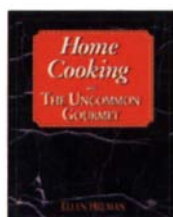
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In Season p. 20

Cook's Garden (800-457-9703; www.cooksgarden.com), carries seeds for Merlot, Four Seasons, Black-Seeded Simpson, Rouge d'Hiver, Buttercrunch, and Sierra lettuces, as well as mesclun mixes. **Johnny's Selected Seeds** (207-861-3900; www.johnnyseeds.com), also has a good selection of lettuce seeds with red and green oak leaves, Freckles, Deer Tongue, Buttercrunch, and mesclun. **Renee's Garden** (888-880-7228; www.reneesgarden.com), sells seeds for Blush Batavians, Heirloom Cutting Mix, Renee's Caesar Duo, and Spring Bouquet Blend.



Artichokes p. 54

While a steamer basket works fine for steaming whole artichokes, Janet Fletcher finds a steel artichoke steamer rack (like the one at right) particularly handy. The artichoke sits upside down on the rack, which fits into a deep stockpot. To order, visit **Pezzini Farms** (www.pezzinifarms.com; 800-347-6118), where a set of four steamer racks is \$18. There you can also find artichoke plates (for \$10 each), which have wells for both the whole artichoke and the sauce, and room to discard the leaves. **Dorothy McNett's Place** (www.happycookers.com; 831-637-6444) also sells artichoke plates and steamers.



Beef Stroganoff p. 63

A 1-ounce bag of dried porcini mushrooms is \$2.25 at **Kalustyans** (212-685-3451; www.kalustyans.com).

Tuiles p. 66

Cook-Eze nonstick baking liners, made of commercial-grade fiberglass, are available through **Cooking.com** (800-663-8810); a 9x13-inch liner is \$11.95, and an 11x17-inch liner is \$13.95. Silpat silicone-coated baking mats are available at **Sur La Table** (www.surlatable.com; 800-243-0852), which carries three sizes, including an 11x17-inch sheet that fits a jellyroll pan for \$19.95. For shaping tuiles into cones, **Kitchen Krafts** (800-776-0575; www.kitchenkrafts.com) sells hardwood cone rollers for \$7.25.

From Our Test Kitchen p. 70

Chefgadget.com (800-797-0352) carries stainless-steel slotted fish spatulas with wooden handles for \$14.50. If you're left-handed, **Lamson Sharp** (www.lamsonsharp.com/store; 413-625-6331) sells a 3x6-inch fish spatula for lefties for \$30.

Cuisines p. 32

The Oriental Pantry (978-264-4576; www.orientalpantry.com), sells Three Crabs fish sauce; (\$4.19 for 24 ounces) and Chinese brown sugar (\$1.19 for a 400-gram slab).

Salmon p. 38

EthnicGrocer.com (847-640-9570) sells a 17-ounce box of French green du Puy lentils for \$7.55. **Indian Harvest** (800-294-2433; www.indianharvest.com) also sells du Puy lentils; a 1½-pound bag is \$7.45.

Sear & Steam Vegetables p. 44

Fermented black beans (black soy beans preserved in salt) give an earthy saltiness to many Chinese dishes. They're sold in most Asian groceries and by **The CMC Company** (800-262-2780; www.thecmccompany.com), where an 8-ounce bag costs \$2.40.



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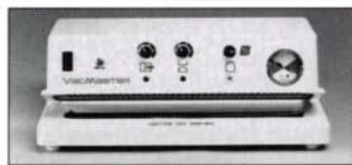


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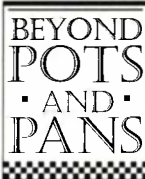
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Recipe (analysis)	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
	total	fromfat			total	sat	mono	poly				
In Season, p. 20												
Bistro Salad w/Warm Goat Cheese	300	250	10	6	28	7	16	2	20	410	3	
World Cuisines, p. 32												
Vietnamese Chicken w/Ginger	490	310	32	14	34	9	16	7	150	1320	1	
Salmon, p. 38												
Broiled Salmon w/Lentil Ragoût	870	500	56	36	56	18	23	10	170	1260	17	w/o couscous
Brochettes of Salmon & Mushrooms	590	340	40	25	37	7	18	10	110	900	3	
Couscous w/Cilantro & Melted Scallions	260	70	8	38	8	5	2	1	20	270	3	
Salmon in Crisp Rice Paper w/Sake Essence	710	320	35	27	36	5	15	13	100	680	1	
Braised Salmon in Lemon Crème Fraîche	620	440	36	4	48	22	15	8	200	610	0	
Sear & Steam Vegetables, p. 44												
Crisp Asian Broccoli	130	100	3	6	12	2	5	4	0	490	3	
Seared Asparagus w/Lemon & Parmesan	130	90	5	6	10	2	7	1	5	340	3	
Balsamic-Glazed Green Beans	130	90	2	8	10	3	6	1	10	250	3	
Brussels Sprouts w/Bacon & Thyme	240	170	6	15	19	7	10	2	20	410	4	
Rice Pilaf, p. 48												
Classic Rice Pilaf	130	70	2	13	7	1	2	4	0	260	0	
Cheesecake, p. 52												
Triple-Chocolate Cheesecake	390	240	7	35	27	16	8	3	100	240	1	based on 16 servings
Artichokes, p. 54												
Fettuccine w/Artichokes, Hazelnuts & Cream	920	420	34	98	46	19	20	4	95	680	13	based on 4 servings
Artichoke & Butter Lettuce Salad	190	120	8	15	13	2	9	1	105	440	7	based on 6 servings
Artichoke Risotto w/Lemon & Parsley	340	90	9	55	10	2	7	1	0	430	7	based on 6 servings
Artichokes w/Peas & Prosciutto	170	70	8	20	8	1	5	1	5	530	8	based on 6 servings
Steamed Artichokes	80	5	6	19	0.5	0	0	0	0	180	10	per artichoke w/o dipping butter
Dipping Butters for Steamed Artichokes	100	100	0	0	11	7	3	1	30	40	0	per tablespoon
Grilled Cheese, p. 60												
Classic Grilled Cheese	250	170	12	10	19	11	5	1	55	410	0	per sandwich
Grilled Brie w/Apricot Jam	240	130	9	19	14	9	4	1	45	380	1	per sandwich
Grilled Mozzarella w/Tomato & Basil	280	160	15	14	18	11	5	1	60	770	2	per sandwich
Grilled Goat Cheese w/Tapenade	220	150	8	10	17	9	6	1	35	560	1	per sandwich
French-Style Grilled Ham & Gruyère	390	210	22	21	24	12	8	2	95	940	1	per sandwich
Beef Stroganoff, p. 63												
Beef Stroganoff w/Cremini & Porcini	500	340	28	14	38	16	11	7	125	670	2	w/o noodles or fettuccine
Tuiles, p. 66												
Tuiles	60	25	1	7	3	2	1	0	10	35	0	per cookie
From Our Test Kitchen, p. 70												
Homemade Crème Fraîche	30	25	0	1	3	2	1	0	10	10	0	per tablespoon
Baked Potato & Leek Soup w/Cheddar 470	290	15	30	32	20	9	2	85	850	3		
Quick & Delicious, p. 86C												
Seared Rib-Eye w/Montreal Spice Mix	410	210	47	1	23	8	9	3	135	600	0	
Pork Chops w/a Dijon-Rye Crust	420	210	38	13	24	8	8	5	115	990	1	
Poached Halibut in Hot & Sour Broth	360	50	51	24	6	1	2	2	75	720	1	
Chili-Rubbed Chicken w/Avocado Salsa	460	210	43	25	23	4	14	3	110	720	5	
Steamed Mussels in Garlicky Wine Broth	780	500	28	13	56	30	18	4	190	1200	1	
Spaghetti w/Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts	750	400	18	72	44	18	16	7	70	670	5	
Creamy Goat Cheese Polenta	400	220	16	32	25	16	7	1	80	520	0	
Chocolate Banana-Cream Sandwiches	380	250	3	32	28	17	8	1	75	60	2	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ⅛ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

AUSTRALIAN LAMB

easy as one, two, three



ONE LEG OF AUSTRALIAN LAMB AND ONE TABLESPOON OF DRIED ROSEMARY



TWO. CUT SLITS IN LAMB, INSERT SIX GARLIC CLOVES.



THREE TABLESPOONS OF OLIVE OIL.

SENSATIONAL!

Enjoy the no-fuss preparation of this Classic Leg of Lamb recipe. It's a whole new take on how to do the holidays - so easy! Then, while it roasts, there's plenty of time to savor the irresistible aromas of your holiday dinner. In one bite, you'll know why no other lamb compares in flavor. A pure, all-natural diet ensures the sweet and mild taste of Fresh Australian Premium Lamb. Visit our website to find more quick and easy lamb recipes.



Australian Lamb.

*For this Classic Leg of Lamb recipe and others, please visit **www.australian-lamb.com**. Also, check out the listing of retailers near you.*



Nori clings tightly to the rocks on which it grows, so harvesting requires grasping and pulling.

flavor from the Sea

Kate Marianchild has been gathering ocean vegetables from the coastline of Mendocino, California, for more than twenty years. She spends late spring and early summer picking the tenderest wakame, nori, sea palm, and other edible sea plants, which her company, Rising Tide Sea Vegetables, sells to retail stores and by mail order. "The first time I tasted wild seaweed, I was astonished by its succulent sweetness," says Kate. The sun-dried vegetables are delicious plain and in soups, salads, and pasta.

The job isn't lucrative, nor are the conditions exactly cushy. Harvesting must be done when the water is low, so work hours are ruled by the tides. For Kate, a licensed harvester, and those who work with her, this means getting up before dawn and braving cold weather, cold water, and big waves. But the payoff is plentiful. "I'm following a lifelong dream, harvesting wild food and living as close as I can to the sea," says Kate.

—Amy Albert, senior editor ♦



For continued spore production and plant regrowth, Kate leaves a good two inches of frond when cutting sea palm.



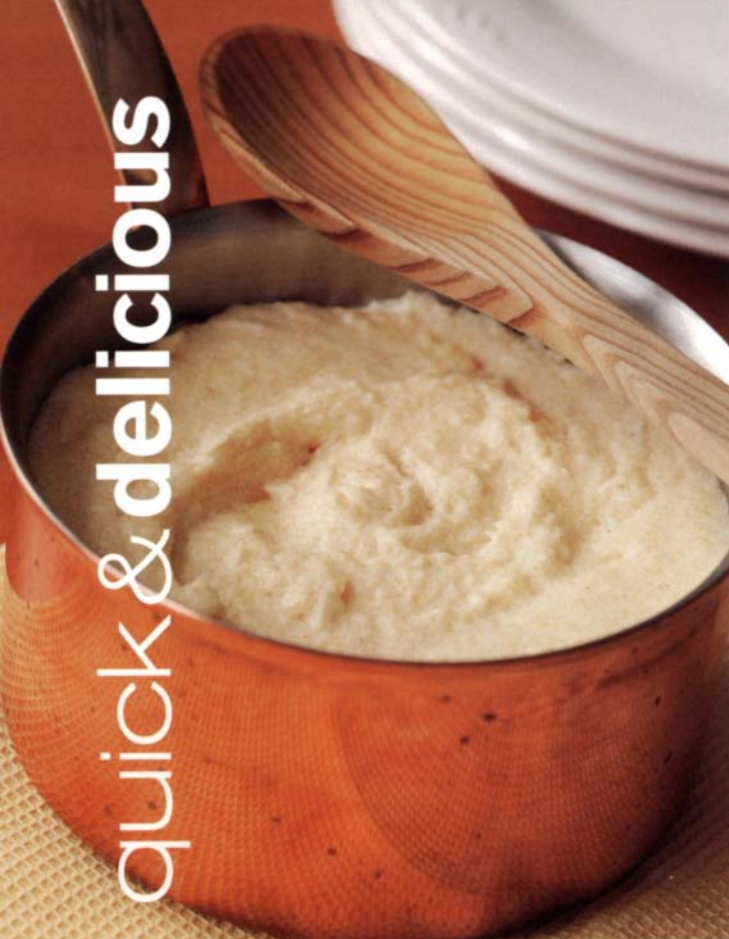
Kate and her partner, Larry Knowles, finish work just hours after sunrise.

Nori



Wakame





Creamy Goat Cheese Polenta

Serves six.

1 quart whole milk
Kosher salt
1 cup instant polenta (I use Colavita brand)
½ lb. fresh goat cheese, crumbled
Pinch cayenne
½ cup heavy cream
Freshly ground black pepper

Bring the milk to a boil in a 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Season with 2 tsp. salt. Slowly whisk in the polenta and cook, stirring constantly, for 5 minutes until the polenta thickens and begins to pull away from the sides of the pan.

Add the goat cheese and cayenne. Whisk until well combined. Whisk in the cream and ½ to 1 cup water to thin the polenta to a porridge-like consistency. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Serving suggestion:

Pair with the Seared Rib-Eye at right. Or for a vegetarian meal, top with sautéed wild mushrooms or a quick tomato sauce.



Seared Rib-Eye with Montreal Spice Mix

Serves four.

1 Tbs. vegetable oil; more for the baking sheet
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic (about 2 large cloves)
1 Tbs. finely chopped shallot (1 small)
½ tsp. black peppercorns, cracked
½ tsp. coriander seeds, cracked
½ tsp. garlic powder
¼ tsp. white peppercorns, cracked
¼ tsp. mustard seeds
Pinch dried red chile flakes
Kosher salt
4 rib-eye steaks, 1 inch thick (about 10 oz. each)

Heat the oven to 400°F.

Heat the oil in a small sauté pan over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Remove the pan from the heat, add the garlic and shallot, and let them soften, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes. With a small spoon, transfer the garlic and shallot to a plate lined with paper towels, leaving as much of the oil in the pan as possible. Return the pan to medium heat and stir in the black peppercorns, coriander seeds,

garlic powder, white peppercorns, mustard seeds, chile flakes, and ¼ tsp. salt. Cook, stirring frequently, until the spices are fragrant and the mustard seeds begin to pop, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer to the plate with the garlic.

Turn on the exhaust fan. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and oil it lightly. Season the steaks with salt on both sides. Heat a heavy 12-inch skillet over high heat for about 3 minutes. Sear two of the steaks in the pan until they're well browned, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer the steaks to the baking sheet. Sear the remaining steaks in the same manner. Put the baking sheet with all four steaks in the oven. Cook for 5 minutes for medium rare, or to the doneness you prefer. Transfer the steaks to a platter, sprinkle with the spice mix, and cover loosely with foil. Let the meat rest for 5 minutes, and then serve immediately.



Steamed Mussels in Garlicky White-Wine Broth

Serves four.

- 3 cups dry white wine** (I like Pinot Grigio)
- 4 lb. mussels**, scrubbed and debearded (see the tip below)
- ½ lb. unsalted butter**, cut into ½-inch chunks
- ½ cup pitted kalamata olives**, chopped
- ½ cup lightly packed coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley** (about 1 small bunch)
- 3 medium cloves garlic**, chopped
- ¼ cup lightly drained capers**, coarsely chopped
- 6 to 8 drops Tabasco**

Bring the wine to a boil in a large pot over high heat. Boil for 4 minutes to reduce it slightly. Add the mussels, cover, and cook, shaking the pot frequently, until they open, 3 to 5 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the mussels to four large bowls, discarding any that didn't open.

Add the butter, olives, parsley, garlic, capers, and Tabasco to the wine and stir gently until the

butter blends with the wine. Spoon the buttery broth over the mussels and serve immediately.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with a soup spoon and some crusty bread to sop up the juices.

tip

❖ To debeard the mussels, use your thumb and index finger to feel around the outside of each shell for any fibrous strands and pull. The "beard" should detach easily from the mussel. Do this as close to cooking time as possible, since debearding the mussel kills it.



Spaghetti with Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts

Serves four.

- ¾ lb. dried spaghetti**
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- ½ cup unsalted butter**
- 3 large portabella mushroom caps**, gills scraped out and discarded, caps thinly sliced and cut into 2-inch pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ⅔ cup loosely packed fresh sage leaves**
- ⅓ cup toasted walnuts**, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the spaghetti and cook until it's tender but still firm to the tooth, about 9 minutes. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water and then drain the pasta and set aside.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil and 2 Tbs. of the butter in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until the butter is melted. Add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're brown and tender, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer the mushrooms to a bowl and set aside.

In the same sauté pan, melt the remaining 6 Tbs. butter over medium heat. Add the sage leaves, and cook, stirring occasionally until they darken and crisp and the flecks of milk solids in the butter are golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Return the mushrooms to the pan and pile in the walnuts, the cooked pasta, and ½ cup of the pasta water. Toss the pasta continuously with tongs to coat well, adding more water as needed so the pasta is moist, 1 to 2 minutes. (If your skillet isn't big enough, you can toss everything together in the pasta pot.) Season with salt and pepper, mound into bowls, and sprinkle generously with the Parmigiano. Serve immediately.



Chili-Rubbed Chicken with Avocado-Mango Salsa

Serves four.

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves**
(about 1¾ lb. total)
- ¼ cup tomato paste**
- 1 tsp. chili powder**
- ½ tsp. garlic powder**
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 mango (about 1 lb.), peeled and cut into**
½-inch dice
- 1 avocado, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice**
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into**
¼-inch dice
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro**
- 2 limes**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

Cut the chicken breast halves lengthwise into ½-inch-wide strips.

In a medium bowl, combine the tomato paste, chili powder, garlic powder, and 1 Tbs. of the olive oil. Add the chicken strips and stir to coat. Marinate for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the mango, avocado, red pepper, cilantro, and the juice of 1 lime in a medium bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cut the remaining lime into wedges.

Heat the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil in a 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat. Season the chicken strips with salt and pepper. Sauté the strips, stirring often, until they're firm to the touch and uniformly opaque, 3 to 4 minutes. Turn off the heat and let sit for 1 minute.

Set the chicken strips on a platter, top with the salsa, fan the lime wedges around, and serve.



Pork Chops with a Dijon-Rye Crust

Serves four.

- 3 slices caraway rye bread**
(such as **Pepperidge Farm seeded Jewish rye**), crusts trimmed
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted**
- 4 bone-in, center-cut pork chops, each 1 inch thick**
(about 2 lb. total)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 3 Tbs. coarse-grained Dijon mustard**

Position one rack in the center of the oven and a second rack directly under the broiler. Heat the oven to 400°F.

Pulse the bread in a food processor until it forms coarse crumbs. Drizzle in the melted butter and pulse a few more times to evenly moisten the crumbs.

Season the pork chops generously with salt and pepper. Heat the oil for 1 minute in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet over high heat. Put the chops in the skillet and cook until nicely browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Remove the skillet from the heat and transfer the chops to a plate. Spread the mustard on one side of

the chops and then gently press on the breadcrumbs.

Return the chops to the pan, crumb side up, put the pan in the oven, and cook until the centers of the chops are slightly firm to the touch and they register 145°F on an instant-read thermometer, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove the skillet from the oven and switch the oven temperature to high broil. Let it heat for about 3 minutes. Put the skillet full of chops under the broiler just long enough to brown the crumb crust, 30 to 60 seconds. Serve immediately.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with green beans and mashed potatoes.



Poached Halibut in Hot & Sour Broth

Serves four.

- 2 Tbs. soy sauce**
- 4 halibut fillets, ½ lb. each (about 1 inch thick)**
- 1 quart homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- ¼ cup honey**
- 3 Tbs. tomato paste**
- 2½ Tbs. cider vinegar**
- 12 quarter-size slices fresh ginger, cut into thin strips**
- ¼ tsp. Tabasco**
- ¼ cup sliced scallions (greens included)**
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro**

Drizzle the soy sauce over both sides of the halibut fillets. Cover and refrigerate.

In a 12-inch sauté pan, combine the chicken broth, honey, tomato paste, vinegar, ginger, and Tabasco. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook gently for 12 minutes, stirring occasionally and skimming foam as necessary. Add the fillets, cover, and poach gently at a bare simmer over medium-low heat until the fillets are slightly firm to the touch and the centers are almost

opaque (make a small slit with a knife to check), 6 to 8 minutes; the fish should be slightly undercooked at this point. Turn off the heat and let sit covered for another 2 minutes.

Divide the halibut and broth evenly among four shallow bowls. Sprinkle generously with the scallions and cilantro and serve with a spoon for the broth.

Serving suggestion:

Set a mound of white or brown rice into the broth with the fish.

tip

❖ You can substitute cod or any other firm-fleshed fish that has a relatively mild flavor. The cooking time of each fish will vary slightly, so be sure to check the fish for doneness.



Open-Faced Chocolate Banana-Cream Sandwiches

Serves six.

- 1 cup heavy cream**
- ½ tsp. granulated sugar**
- ¼ cup unsalted butter**
- 3 slightly underripe bananas, sliced ½-inch thick on the diagonal**
- 2 Tbs. dark rum**
- 1 Tbs. honey**
- Pinch kosher salt**
- ½ cup chopped semisweet chocolate or morsels (about 3½ oz.)**
- 6 digestive tea biscuits (I use Carr's; see the box at right)**

Whip the cream with the sugar to medium-soft peaks in a medium bowl; refrigerate.

Melt 3 Tbs. of the butter in a 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat until the flecks of milk solids in the butter start turning brown. Add the bananas in a single layer and cook without stirring until they brown, about 1 minute. Flip the bananas with a spatula and brown the other side. Pour in the rum and then add the honey, the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, and the salt. Stir and flip very gently until the bananas are evenly coated. Take off the heat and keep warm.

Melt the chocolate over a double boiler or in the microwave (see how on p. 52). Stir in 2 to 3 Tbs. water to thin the chocolate to a pourable consistency.

Set the cookies on six dessert plates, spoon over a portion of the bananas, and drizzle with the melted chocolate. Top with a dollop of the cream and serve immediately.

tip

❖ Digestive biscuits are crumbly tea cookies often found with other British brands on the cookie aisle. As a substitute, try graham crackers.